

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



JULY

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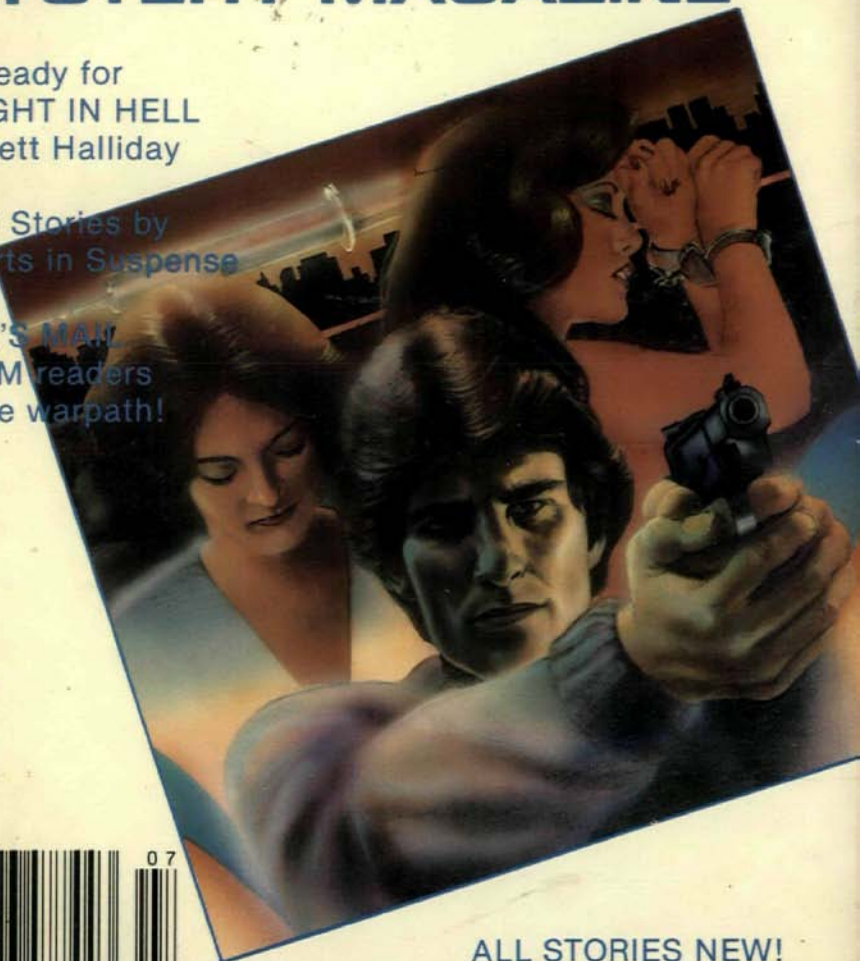


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by Brett Halliday

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A NIGHT IN HELL

by Brett Halliday

The Miami detective had been involved in violent cases before, but this one threatened to make the others look like Sunday school picnics! 4

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In the window's reflection, Shayne saw the doors leading to the kitchen burst open. Two men with shotguns appeared. The detective twisted to the side, his right foot slamming into the table's edge. He spun to the floor and pulled out his .38 as the sawed-off shotguns blasted at him!

A Night In Hell

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

6:02 P.M.

LUCY HAMILTON KNELT OVER THE PROSTRATE BODY ON the hard floor. In the darkness of the hotel room, her old friend, Ronnie Dessaints, had just emptied the entire load of an automatic pistol into the shadowy figure that had been standing in the doorway.

The brunette's moist fingers felt for the neck.

No pulse. "He's . . . he's dead."

"What's wrong?" said Ronnie. "You sound like I shot the wrong man."

Lucy's pulse raced as fast as her stomach sank. Only two men could have come through that door at this time—Michael Shayne, her ex-boss and more, and Victor, Ronnie's lover, the man she feared was an international assassin. Which one was it? "Find a light—quick," she shouted.

This was certainly not the result the brunette had in mind when she had accepted her old friend's dinner invitation three nights ago. If only she and Michael hadn't had their problems, hadn't let their emotions

run away with them, she wouldn't have broken off their relationship, both professionally and personally. Then this wouldn't have happened.

And there was something else—Michael would have handled the whole situation differently. If Ronnie had confessed to him what she believed about Victor, he would have been immediately suspicious, more on guard. He'd have been wary of Victor's every move.

But not you, Luce. You let yourself get too emotional, too involved. You agreed to help Ronnie, to provide a second opinion, but right from the start, that first night over dinner at the Grand Hotel, admit it, you broke one of Michael's cardinal rules. How many times has he warned you not to go into a case with any preconceived ideas about the situation or the people involved? "If you judge people by the way you think they ought to act, Angel," he had said, "you're behind the eight ball before the break."

So, Luce, you went to Ronnie's hoity-toity party the next night, and you got caught up in the caviar and champagne set. Michael would have kept his distance, his perspective on things. He wouldn't have let Cinderella's ball or the Dom Perignon go to his head. Even though Ronnie had warned you that Victor was charming and magnetic, you were still drawn to his eyes. You wouldn't believe the king cobra can hypnotize its victims.

And the subsequent fight with Michael. If it hadn't been for a night at the ball, do you think you two would have quarreled over something as insignificant as a stiff workload? You should have been willing to compromise. Michael met you half-way, playing down how many cases he had been taking on. You, oh one with your head in the clouds, had a small problem with a friend you hadn't seen in years, but he had some thirty open cases, a luncheon with the Mayor's Crime Task Force, and testimony at a trial tomorrow that Gar Ragland, the head of the DEA, had called vital to bringing down the kingpin of South Florida's narcotics trade. Talk about your misplaced values.

And instead of going to Tim Rourke of the *Miami Daily News* with yours and Ronnie's suspicions, you should have sought out the police, especially when a member of the group Victor was trying to sell real estate to died. And when that same man turned out to be an agent of Interpol, you should have known his death wasn't an accident. You should have screamed until someone heard you.

Face it, kid. At every turn, you went the wrong way, and the result of your blundering along is this husk of a man on the floor beneath you.

Pride goeth before the fall. You've certainly had your share thinking you, someone with as little experience in these matters as you've had, could handle the situation. When Tim helped you to see that Victor was

indeed the hired killer that Ronnie suspected, the assassin Interpol called Mamba, you two should have marched straight into the MPD. No, you were running on emotions, so first you tried to hide Ronnie out in a sleazy hotel. When the pot got too hot, you took Ronnie's suggestion and called Michael into the situation blindly.

Damn! If you had been alert, you'd have noticed how distraught Ronnie was. And when she showed you that automatic pistol, you should have taken it from her. A gun in her hands was an indiscriminate killer. When she pulled the trigger, the poor girl didn't know what she was doing, whom she had killed, or even that she had kept firing till the hammer clicked on empty.

No matter how you cut it, Luce, you are responsible for the body on the floor. Oh, Ronnie may have pulled the trigger, but it's your fault. "I can't find the light," interrupted Ronnie.

In the midst of darkness Lucy faced the truth squarely. At any time she could have reached up over her head and flipped on the overhead light. But she didn't want to.

Victor and the big redhead were the same size, but she had no doubt that the body in her hands belonged to Michael Shayne.

You can't put it off any longer, kid. Her hand slid up the gritty, peeling wallpaper. Fingertips contacted a metal plate and she pushed.

Involuntarily she threw up her hands in the sudden brightness and closed her eyes.

Ronnie screamed from beside her.

Slowly Lucy forced her eyes open. The drab room came into focus. With extra effort she lowered her gaze.

The dead man was Victor Sabal.

FOR A MOMENT SHE DIDN'T KNOW HOW SHE FELT. GUILT, relief, sorrow, elation all flooded her system, overloading, shorting it. She alternately wanted to cry and scream "Hallelujah."

Michael was alive.

But Victor was dead.

She heard the quick, hard breathing on her neck. Ronnie was standing over them, the gun in her hand, and an indecipherable look on her face. Of course, what her friend was feeling now was closely akin to her own sensations. Relief that Victor could no longer kill her because she knew too much, and sorrow because a man she had truly loved was dead, killed by her own hand.

Her reverie was interrupted. In the distance sirens sounded. The phone was ringing. The sirens were getting closer. Nearby someone shouted. The relentless phone prodded her.

"I'm sorry about all this," Ronnie said. "I truly am." She tossed the gun down and bolted through the open door.

Lucy shouted, "Ronnie, come back."

Footsteps decreased in volume down the hallway.

"We can face this thing together," Lucy called. "I can explain to the authorities."

Her hands felt wet. She looked down. Victor was bleeding all over her. She shook her hands. Blood splattered like dishwater. Harder footsteps echoed from the lobby. Instinctively she picked up the gun. Why?

"Freeze, lady."

Lucy looked up slowly. In the doorway stood two beat cops, their .38's inches away from her head.

"The gun's . . . empty," she stammered.

"It looks that way," said a policeman matter-of-factly.

"I didn't," the brunette started. "You see my friend and I were . . ." Lucy stopped. As if from above, she saw herself. It was like a rerun of every bad cop show she had ever seen on television.

Only it wasn't TV. She was really kneeling there in a puddle of blood, blood that had stained her hands and clothes.

"Drop the piece, lady," said the other cop, "or so help me, we'll send you to where he went."

The gun clattered to the floor. Lucy was only half-conscious of what happened next. Images and sensations were so disjointed, so inappropriate. A palm grabbed her wrist and twisted it behind her. Then the other arm. Pain shot through her sockets. Cold metal clasped her wrists behind her and she couldn't move. A hand under her right armpit lifted her.

A voice began to talk monotonically. "You have the right . . . remain silent . . . a lawyer present . . . one will be appointed." Then some words in Spanish.

What was happening to her?

"Come on, lady. Now that you've been Mirandized, we're going to take a little trip."

"But I didn't do anything but prevent someone from getting killed," she protested.

"From where I'm standing then, sugar," said one of the cops, "you didn't do a very good job, did you?"

Well, at least, Luce, Michael was alive and not here to see the mess you've gotten yourself into.

Instinct told her to look up. A familiar figure stood in the doorway. It was Michael Shayne.

6:10 P.M.

LUCY FELT A SUDDEN SENSE OF RELIEF. IN THE MIDST OF the storm, a lighthouse. She didn't know which was best—that he was alive or that he was there to help.

"Michael," she said, casting her newly-found independence to the wind. "Thank God you're here."

"Who are you talking to, lady?" said the shorter of the two policemen.

She instinctively turned to the cop as he spoke, but when she looked back to the doorway, Shayne had vanished. Had the pressure gotten the better of her? Had she simply imagined Michael was there because he always was in the past? No, of course, she had seen him.

"I'll take the broad down to the unit, Mel," said the tall cop, "and call this one in. You stay here. We don't want some civilian stumbling into the room. Remember how Sarge chewed out Sammon's butt last week over what happened after the arcade shooting?"

"Make it quick. I want to be at the Tick Tock Cafe by 9:00. That's when the *chiqua* with the big castinets comes on duty."

As she was led down the dimly-lit hallway of the Riviera Towers, Lucy had a feeling of abandonment. Being hauled off downtown like a common criminal. What would happen to Ronnie now?

At least Michael wasn't here after all to see her humiliation.

They walked out the lobby, past the desk clerk and a man in the telephone booth.

SHAYNE HUNG UP THE RECEIVER AS THEY PASSED. BY THE time the investigating officers arrived and the squad car got Lucy downtown, his lawyer, Murdock, would be waiting. Lucy would have to endure the routine questioning, booking, and prelims, but then Matt would have her cut loose.

It had only taken him seconds to size up the situation. One glance into Room 124 had showed him the overwhelming circumstantial evidence. The body on the floor, the blood on Lucy's hands, "Drop the piece," then the Miranda. Yeah, despite the appearances, the Lucy Hamilton he knew and cared about wouldn't kill anybody in a sleazy hotel room—unless her life was in danger.

The redhead knew at the same time he was useless there. If this were a Hollywood version of his life, or worse, a Tim Rourke fictionalization of his exploits, then he would have walked into the room and said hello to the uniforms, who just happened to be his good friends. They would in turn have given him free and easy access to the crime scene, secure in the knowledge he wouldn't touch, much less destroy any

material evidence. And Lucy would have been released into his custody because the cops, knowing her also, would realize that she was incapable of committing such a crime.

Bull!

This was the real world and he had to live in it. The odds that he would know two uniforms out of over 2000 cops was absurd, especially since the average term of service was around three years. And, even if he had by chance known them, real cops would lose their jobs for letting a civilian into the area. Procedure, always procedure.

He had disappeared quickly, too, because in this real world of his if he had barged in and made his connection to Lucy known, he would have been taken with her as a possible accessory to the crime.

No, he had done what he had to. He would explain to Lucy later.

From the phone booth he could see his secretary fidgeting in the back seat of the patrol car. Her round face sat like a pale moon behind the wire cage. For a split-second he felt a jolt of her insecurity flash through his system. They would have to talk when this one was over. He had said some things to her he hadn't completely meant.

Knowing the uniforms were in the process of turning the case over to the gold shields who had caught it, he hurried over to the desk clerk. "How long have you been on duty?" he said without turning his face toward the pimply-faced kid who looked like he belonged in a video arcade more than a fleabag.

"Punched in at 4:00," said the kid without looking up from behind a *Daredevil* comic book. "Go off at midnight, just in time to catch David Letterman."

"Thanks," said the detective. He had to be careful. While he wanted to ask the clerk some questions, he had to wait until the police had wrapped up their preliminary investigation in 124.

SHAYNE PUSHED OPEN THE DOOR MARKED *HOMICIDE*. The third floor smelt of new paint and concrete. A month after the bombing of the office of one of the few men in the MPD he did know, Chief Will Gentry, the bureaucracy had finally gotten around to the needed restoration.

As usual the huge open room was crowded with stale smoke and tired talk. It was nothing like VICE filled with a gaudy parade of prostitutes who propositioned you while they were being booked.

Sitting behind a desk, Lucy looked totally out of place, completely drained. Her eyes were red and her face was paler than he could remember it. Nearly anemic.

Luck was starting to balance the scales. The bad news was Lucy had

been found at the scene of a fatal shooting, but the good was who had picked up the case, another acquaintance—Lt. Gerry Oliva.

Oliva seemed to be chatting with more than interrogating the distraught brunette, but Matt Murdock kept shaking his head at her.

Oliva looked up. "Bout time you got here. I was just saying that if that ambulance-chaser Murdock is here, can Mike Shayne be far behind?"

Lucy turned quickly, then held up her opened arms. "Michael."

"Hey, no touching the suspect," said the Lieutenant with a wry grin.

Murdock said, "Good move, Lieutenant. I think Mike was going to hand her his extra .38 so they could shoot their way out of here."

Oliva drew deeply on his briar pipe and stifled a laugh. He stood up and looked at the redhead. "Meet you at the water-cooler, Mike. You look like you could use a stiff drink."

Shayne pivoted and zig-zagged his way through the gauntlet of Formica-topped desks.

Oliva drew two cups of water.

"A twist of lemon with mine, Gerry," said the investigator.

Oliva handed him the cup. "Mike, let's not kid each other. I just got a call from my partner, Jiggy Cheatham, over at the Riviera."

"What do you have?"

"Do you think I can tell you just like that?" He crumbled the cup. "Enough so that if I don't book her tonight, I'll be a sergeant tomorrow."

"Can I talk with her a minute, Ger?"

"Yeah. We just had a big red light bust go down, and they told us booking is backed up for a while. I'll give you fifteen minutes."

"Thanks," said Shayne.

The redhead walked back to Oliva's desk. "Matt," he said to the attorney, "buy Gerry coffee, sandwiches, a filet mignon. Anything to keep him occupied as long as you can. I've got to talk to Lucy."

"Sure, you got any quarters."

Shayne emptied his pockets and sent Murdock away. He pulled up a nearby chair across from his secretary.

"Michael," she said, her voice sounding like ice on the edge of cracking if it didn't melt first, "I'm so sorry about . . ."

"No time, Angel. We know what we really mean to each other. Now, I want you to tell me everything that happened between the time you arrived at the Riviera Towers and the police showed up."

"So I did see you there."

"Yeah. When did you get there?"

"Ronnie and I checked in at about 10:00 last night."

"The Acne Kid on the desk?"

Lucy closed her eyes. "Yeah, I think so."

"Did anyone else know you were there?"

"No, we came from my apartment, and I made sure, just like you showed me, that we weren't followed."

"Did either of you go out?"

"Yes, both of us."

"Who first?"

"Me. This morning around 8:00. To see Tim at the *Daily News*."

"He told me about how you two checked that list you brought him and found that Veronique and her friend Victor Sabal were in some eight cities when somebody important was killed."

"Ronnie thought Victor was doing the killing, that he was some kind of an assassin."

"Tim mentioned Mamba."

"That's the one."

"You said you both left the Riviera?"

"Yes. I got back around noon today after seeing Tim and found Ronnie gone. I took a nap and when I awoke she came back."

"When was that?"

"Before six."

"Any idea where she went?"

"No."

"Tell me exactly how Victor died."

"Ronnie was very nervous. Insisted I call you. While we waited, she got panicky. Overturned a bed. We huddled in a corner. When we heard somebody outside the room, she suddenly pulled out a gun. Before I could do anything, she emptied the gun. It was so dark, Michael. I thought it was you. I almost . . ."

"Forget that for now. Did anything else happen?"

"Well . . ."

"Try to be as specific as you can."

"How can I forget. I thought it was you. I screamed, 'He's dead.' Then Ronnie said, 'What's wrong? You sound like I shot the wrong man?' I turned on the lights because Ronnie couldn't find them. Victor was dead on the floor. Ronnie dropped the gun at my feet and fled. Michael, I'm so worried about her."

"Then the cops showed."

"Yes."

"Any idea where Veronique is now?"

"They had a suite at the Grand Hotel." She paused. "You said you knew her in the past. Was that the time you brought her back to New

Orleans from St. Louis?"

"Time's up," announced Oliva from behind the detective.

Shayne got up. He put his hands firmly on her shoulders and kissed her on the cheek. For a moment he could feel her fear pass between them. "It'll be O.K. I promise," he said softly, but strongly.

The redhead turned to face Oliva. "Sorry, Ger, about the touch. You can book me later."

Murdock said, "She stays overnight, prelim in the morning."

Shayne shook the lawyer's hand. "I know she's in good hands."

"Second-best pair in town," said the attorney.

SHAYNE WALKED OUT THE ENTRANCE AND STOOD A moment on N.W. 5th. Across the street a few lights were still on in the State Administration Building. Lighting up a cigarette, he started down the sidewalk toward the visitors' parking lot. At least Lucy was out of danger for the moment. When Veronique had first appeared in town four days ago, he should have known something like this would happen. That girl was more trouble than a pedigree poodle in heat, but he didn't even like to think about it.

Out of the corner of his steel-gray eyes, he spotted the sedan rounding the block below headquarters. Slow moving. Celebrity smoked-glass.

He kept walking, his right hand unbuttoning his sports coat.

Windows rolled slowly down.

Unobtrusively his hand reached toward the small of his back.

The car accelerated.

His fingers wrapped around the cool steel of his Smith & Wesson. His head turned slightly around.

Twin barrels balanced on the descending glass.

7:38 P.M.

THE SEDAN WAS ON TOP OF HIM.

Shayne hit the ground.

Buckshot scattered across the sidewalk where he had just been.

The detective rolled.

A second shotgun appeared beside the first.

Shayne's hand came up with the .38.

Another load buried itself in a coconut palm inches above his head.

The S&W exploded with two quick rounds.

Bulletproof, the redhead realized as the slugs pinged harmlessly off the car's body.

The dark sedan slid into a U-turn.

The investigator crouched behind a long car with dice on the mirror and leopard-skin seats. A pimpmobile. Resting his elbows on the hood, he strangled the revolver's handle with both hands.

Windows slid down on the opposite side of the moving sedan.

Shayne drew a bead on where the driver ought to be behind the smoked glass. He squeezed in rapid succession until the hammer clicked on empty.

Four shots hurled into their target. The windshield spiderwebbed.

The sedan swerved suddenly.

A load of buckshot took out a newly-planted hibiscus.

Shayne sat down behind the green Cadillac and pulled some extra rounds out of the sidepocket of his sports coat.

Pellets slammed into the custom paint job inches from his head. Paint flecks and sparks flew around him. A lucky shot.

As soon as the second shotgun fired above him, Shayne popped up and fired at the sedan's rear tires.

The car kept going into the darkness. The detective couldn't be sure if he had hit anything. One thing he knew—the car had not had a license plate and couldn't be identified.

The redhead pulled himself to his feet. Holstering his piece, he brushed himself off. The surge of adrenalin spent, he felt weak.

"Aw sheet! What chu done to my ride, sucker?" screamed a voice from behind Shayne.

Running down the sidewalk toward him was a mustached Hispanic in a turquoise linen suit and an orange t-shirt. His hair was done in knots and his face in anger. "Man, somebody gonna pay for this. You know how much eight coats of handrubbed paint be costing?"

"I give," said Shayne. "How much?"

"Don't chu shuck me. Somebody got to pay."

"I'll tell you what," said the detective nodding at the army of uniformed policemen running toward them. "Let's take it up with them."

The pimp snapped his head around. "The heat. Why? This ain't my car. Just one that look like mine." He started walking down the street. "Be cool."

A BLOCK DOWN FROM THE RIVIERA SHAYNE PULLED around the corner and parked the Buick. It had taken him almost an hour to answer all of the MPD's questions. they seemed more worried that someone had been shooting right outside headquarters than that he had nearly been killed. Turf. The whole procedure would have taken longer if it hadn't been for Oliva's intervention. The hour didn't bother Shayne. He had to give Cheatham and the other investigators time to

finish.

The detective fired up a Camel and peered around the corner toward the Riviera Towers. No police units in sight. He walked down the sidewalk toward the hotel. Amateur night at the MPD it hadn't been. The two guys in the expensive sedan were pros. Why had they come after him? The sudden publicity generated by Tim Rourke's columns? Doubtful. Old enemies? Possible. But that list was longer than the IRS file on income-tax cheaters. A present case? Sure, but which one? How had they known he was at the MPD? A tip? Where had he been picked up?

He quickened his pace, his eyes as always scanning both sides of the street, searching for the slightest hint of another hit. Maybe it had something to do with Victor Sabal's death, but what? He had never known the man personally. But Lucy had.

At another time he would have pursued every possible means of finding out who had attacked him, but right now he didn't have the luxury. Lucy was in the hot seat, and it was partially his fault. The only way to get her off was to find the other woman in the room.

Veronique or Ronnie. He had another name for the woman who brought back a lot of painful memories.

The kid at the desk was engrossed by *Captain America*. Shayne pulled out his notepad. "Got time for a few questions?"

"Sure. Say, weren't you here earlier?"

"Right."

"Yeah, I mentioned to Lt. Cheatham I had seen you around."

"No need to," said Shayne. "I'm a reporter for the *Daily News*."

"Yeah? Hey, do you know Tim Rourke? That guy's my idol."

"He works days. I catch the streetlight scene."

"Me too."

Shayne pulled out his pen. "That Lucy Hamilton they arrested. She the only one in the room?"

"Nope. I was here last night when she registered. Geez is she tough-looking. The other broad had short black hair. Figured them for a pair of hookers, but it ain't no skin off my butt."

"Hamilton tells me both she and the other one went out this morning. Would you know about that?"

"No way. Reg is on from 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M."

"Reg?"

"Reg Giordano. He . . . hold it, I did see the other one come in the fire door—it ain't been locked for months, but that's no skin off my butt."

"What?"

"About supper. Say, 5:00."

"You see her leave again?"

"You mean after the gunshots?"

"Yeah."

"No," said the kid, "but I was back in the office about that time going through the registration cards for the day. I never even saw the guy who got wasted come in. Course I saw him leave."

"You don't seem too torn up about it?"

"Hey, that's no skin . . ."

"It ought to be," said the redhead. "It ought to be so much off it that it hurts to sit down."

The kid looked at Shayne quizzically through his acne, then rejoined Captain America.

COCONUT GROVE WAS ONLY A FEW MILES AWAY, BUT THE Grand Hotel was light years from the Riviera Towers. Its 45-degree side always reminded the redhead of some Aztec tomb. Only gods, or the very rich, could afford to be buried there. It was the kind of place where Victor Sabal should have bought it.

Fifty dollars got him up to the penthouse. The place was empty, but all Sabal's clothing still sat in drawers. Veronique's things, on the other hand, were missing.

Shayne took the elevator back to the lobby and the middle-aged desk clerk. Fifty more bucks told him that Mr. and Mrs. Sabal had not checked out. No, said the clerk, he wouldn't know if Mrs. Sabal had been there today at all.

A dead end.

THE HOT SHOWER NEARLY SCALDED THE REDHEAD. THE crescent scar on his shoulder seemed to glow, but it didn't hurt. Dead skin had no feeling. Veronique had obviously gone back to the Grand Hotel some time to gather up her things. It could have been in the time from 8:00 this morning to when Lucy had awoken or it could have been right after the shooting. He had to find the dark-haired woman, but where could he start looking? He didn't even have a picture to show around, though her image was indelibly inscribed in his mind.

How many years ago had it been?

Over the running water, he heard the phone. Wrapping a towel around himself, he stepped out and picked up the receiver on his night table.

"Hello, Mike. Long time no see."

It was Veronique.

10:14 P.M.

SHAYNE SHIFTED HIS WEIGHT. "STILL UP TO YOUR OLD tricks, eh Veronique?"

"Whatever do you mean, Mickey, honey?" she drawled in an exaggerated Southern accent.

"Getting yourself in trouble, then running out, leaving somebody else to take the blame."

"Don't be bitter, sugar. That was long, long ago."

"Yeah, a couple of hours," said the redhead. "Where are you?"

"That's not important." She dropped the accent. "Mickey, I need help."

"So does Lucy."

"And you're her knight in shining armor. I can explain everything—really, but I had to get out of that hotel quickly."

"Why? Victor was dead."

"You don't understand about Victor and his friends."

"You mean the group he was trying to sell real estate to?"

"Like I said, you don't understand."

"Then why don't you make me see it the way it is?"

"That's why I called. You're the only person in this town I know now, the only one I can trust."

"You can come to me after St. Louis?"

"St. Louis is a lifetime away, and I think we're both a lot different now."

"Where and when do we meet?" said Shayne.

"Your office."

"No, not there. Some place more public," he said, recalling what had happened just outside the police department as well as in the Gateway to the West. "Why don't you meet me at the Carousel Room."

"Where's that?"

"Over on the Beach. The Buccaneer Hotel."

"Give me an hour."

"Lady, if I had my way, I wouldn't give you the time of day."

EXACTLY ONE HOUR LATER, AFTER TAKING A CIRCUITOUS route across the Bay, the detective exited the elevator on the top floor of Miami Beach's posh new resort hotel. The supper crowd had long since given way to the late-night tipplers, men and women who preferred to gaze at the distant night-time skyline rather than the familiar walls of lonely apartments.

She stood out as she always did. Hell, with her looks—those huge eyes and thick, black hair—she would have stood out at a Miss America

pageant. Seated by the window she appeared to be staring through the glass, but the detective could tell by the tilt of her head she wasn't as interested in the twinkling lights below as in the lusty eyes of the male singles who still dotted the room. He'd be willing to bet that every last one of them had made her an offer, or wished he had, and been refused.

They didn't know how lucky they were to have failed.

"Hello, Mickey," she said as he approached. She didn't turn her head away from the window.

"Hello, Veronique."

"Ronnie to my friends."

"Hello, Veronique."

"I thought it was the woman who always dwelt on the past."

Shayne sat down across the table from her. Over her right shoulder the city of Miami had spread out a festival of lights. A waiter appeared out of nowhere with a snifter of brandy and a glass of water that he set down in front of the redhead.

Veronique raised her glass of white wine. "Some things never change. Martell, right?"

Ignoring the toast, Shayne took a sip of the warm cognac. "If you say so."

She lowered the crystal slowly so that her deep-set eyes balanced on the lip. "Ten pounds heavier, an extra scar on the cheek, a hint of gray around the ears." She paused. "But those same damned eyes. You and Victor."

Shayne rasped his left thumbnail across the stubble on his chin. The filmy white dress plunged deeply, revealing a great heave of bosom. "And you're still the same damned game-player. You said you left Lucy in the room with Victor's body because you had to get away. Why the urgency? Why no explanation?"

"As Daddy Dearest said the day he kicked me out of Dessaints Manor, 'you don't lie down with dogs without getting up with fleas.'"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You know by now Victor was an international assassin. He had contacts, people who didn't like him perhaps, but feared him. As long as Victor was alive, I was safe."

"Keep going."

"They suspect I know a lot more about Victor's business than I do. I'm . . . what is it they call it in detective novels . . . a loose end?"

"I don't have time to read detective novels."

"Anyway, now that Victor's out of the way, I'm vulnerable, and they'll want me eliminated."

"Well, I want you to corroborate Lucy's version of what happened earlier tonight. The police think she killed Victor."

"Believe me, Mickey, I would never let Lucifer suffer for something I did. I plan to let the police know the truth . . . but on my terms, at my time."

Shayne felt a fire flare in his gut. "Some things really don't change. You're still the same self-centered brat I pulled out of that hot-sheet hotel in St. Louis. Everything has to be by your rules or you walk off the playing field."

"You didn't understand me then, and it's pretty clear you don't want to understand me now." She ran her tongue across the crystal. "But never mind our relationship. What's more important is clearing up this matter."

The Martell and the conversation were leaving a bad aftertaste. "To hell with your terms. We're going from the Buccaneer directly to the MPD—now."

"Oh, tough guy, you're going to throw me over your shoulder again and take me to father. Well, the old bastard is dead. Besides, remember what happened the last time you tried?"

"Let's go," he said, standing up.

"Nobody treats me like this any more."

"Then just get up and we'll walk out together."

The redhead was looking straight at the reluctant woman framed by the plate-glass, but he saw more than a beautiful face.

In the reflection the doors leading to the kitchen burst open. Two men he had never seen before appeared.

But the shotguns in their hands were all-too-familiar.

11:24 P.M.

IN ONE MOTION SHAYNE TWISTED TO THE SIDE, HIS RIGHT foot slamming into the table's edge. Glasses toppling, the table rammed the surprised Veronique. Backwards she flew.

The redhead kept spinning to the floor.

Magnified by the enclosed room, the simultaneous explosions of the sawed-off shotguns were deafening.

The plate-glass shattered outward, scattering shards into the night. The table Shayne had been sitting at seconds earlier splintered.

The patrons who had been hiding from their fears suddenly found them. Shrieks filled the momentary calm after the gunfire. Bodies that had been seeking each other sought something even more primitive, shelter.

Shayne snaked behind a heavy metal food-warmer on wheels.

The second salvo took out the salad bar and a dishwater blonde who had only gotten half into the Women's Room.

The .38 appeared in the investigator's hand. For the first time he got a good look at his attackers. Hispanic—very young and, judging from the glaze that covered their eyes like a mask, very high.

As they broke down their sawed-offs to reload, one of the kids' eyes caught Shayne.

It was the last thing he ever saw. At close range the .38 slug returned him to the kitchen like an undercooked piece of meat.

The second Hispanic wheeled around and fired wildly, defoliating a hanging fern above Shayne's head.

The redhead ducked and when he looked up the kid was on top of him. The charging bull rammed the metal cart into the detective.

The S&W tumbled to the carpet. The guy leaped onto the cart and holding his gun by the barrel began to swing berserkly.

Shayne could almost see the horse in his liquid eyes.

Using the gun like a scythe, the grim Hispanic aimed for Shayne's head, but succeeded only in knocking a flaming shish kebab to the floor.

The redhead kept ducking, but his piece was out of reach. Instinctively his hand grabbed the fiery skewer. Oblivious to the pain, he thrust upward.

The guy groaned something inhuman and vomited as Shayne speared his abdomen. Then, like a farmer with a load of hay on his pitchfork, Shayne lifted and threw the body off to the side.

Wondering if he should cut off the ears, the detective picked up his .38.

The elevator opened. Another shotgun poked through.

Shayne drilled the guy before the doors had stopped.

An Hispanic charged the redhead. Shayne stepped aside. His antagonist collided with the cart at full speed. The warmer rolled the few feet to the window and served its contents into the gaping maw that had once been glass.

What in hell was going on? Shayne wondered. Why had an expensive restaurant suddenly become a shooting gallery? The redhead's eyes swiveled back and forth, looking for the next attacker. The guys in the sedan earlier had been pros. Their method and vehicle were proof of that, but this latest group had amateur stamped all over them. Pros didn't get so high they mistook a blonde woman for their victim.

For that matter, who was the intended victim? Shayne had two prime candidates, but the election would have to wait. Another Hispanic appeared in the kitchen doors. In his hands was a new calling card, an

Uzi.

Shayne snapped off two rounds, driving the guy back inside.

The redhead bolted around the corner and kept going till he had covered nearly 360 degrees, then paused.

The Hispanic with the Uzi had his back to him. His shoulders swivelled and his head jerked back and forth.

Shayne hit the carpet and extended into the prone position. His sights lined up on the greasy black hair. Forget all those DEA metaphors—this wasn't war and he couldn't bring himself to squeeze.

"Drop it," yelled the redhead.

The Uzi disintegrated furniture as it turned.

Shayne fired twice. The second round was unnecessary.

He hurried back to what remained of the table he had been at.

Veronique had disappeared.

Still cautious, he entered the kitchen.

Two white-hatted chefs lay on the floor, blood leaking from what had been their faces.

Shayne grabbed the sink and locked his elbows. In all the time he had been in Miami he couldn't remember such a slaughter, such violence in a public place. What in hell was going on?

The new breed.

SHAYNE STUBBED OUT ANOTHER CAMEL IN THE ASHTRAY of the interrogation room. From the number of butts lying there, the MBPD had left him alone almost an hour. He stared out the window. Bright lights winked innocently, unaware of the changing face of Florida.

Minutes after he had taken out the last Hispanic, the Buccaneer's security force had arrived. An old man whose gut was bigger than his brain and a thin guy with a mustache whose hair wreaked of marijuana. Five minutes later the MBPD S.W.A.T. squad had taken over the place. Nine scared men and women who had learned to appreciate the loneliness of their apartments corroborated his version of the attack. In the confusion none of the patrons had seen what had happened to Veronique, though all of them remembered her.

Had the attack been a diversion so the Hispanics could grab her?

The redhead closed his eyes to get his bearings. With all the publicity generated by Tim Rourke's columns on him and his business, Shayne had been wearing down these last two weeks. Tonight the adrenalin had run out. His whole body felt tired. Usually during a case his constant companion was that energy surging through his body. But right now, on the most important case of his life, with Lucy in jail and depending

upon him, he felt old, worn out.

Veronique, his past, old enemies. He knew he hadn't been looking back, but they were gaining on him.

And where was he? In the interrogation room of the MBPD, a department run by his old nemesis, Chief Peter Painter. Shayne turned out the light and lay down on the cold steel table. Unbuttoning his shirt he began to regulate his breathing, to slow it down till he reached six respiratory cycles a minute. He closed his eyes and tried to clear his head.

How long would they hold him? He had killed at least three men in the space of a minute, but somehow that minute seemed another existence. That had been survival, a corner he had been pushed into. He didn't like pulling the trigger, but what else could he do?

Probably Lt. Cooke, the S.W.A.T.-team commander, had called Petey, and the little martinet was taking his time, waxing his mustache while he made Mike Shayne sweat. If he couldn't get the bastard legally, he could at least sweat a few pounds off the shamus' ego.

In the distance Shayne heard footsteps, and suddenly the last four days all began to come together. Victor Sabal, an international hitman. The upcoming trial. No attempts, then two professional, followed by a gaffe of amateurs.

The footsteps were mechanical with clock-like deliberation, every other step louder.

The DEA.

The doorknob turned.

"Come in, Ragland," Shayne called.

1:04 A.M.

SHAYNE HAD KNOWN GARLAND HARTFORD RAGLAND, the DEA's Chief of Narcotics Investigation for Dade County, ever since the organization's initials had begun to mean more to Miami than FUN or VISA. Tonight the top narc seemed even gaunter than when he had last seen him off Key West and the destruction of the drug depot referred to as *Cayo Muerte*. The war on drugs had taken its toll on the fed. A sallow complexion, heavy eyelids that seemed more closed than open, and a crewcut that looked too scraggy around the ears to pass inspection.

"I know why you're here, Ragland," said the redhead. "You're going to give me a medal for wiping out a squad of the enemy's grunts."

"Are you kidding, Red. I wouldn't even fill out a voucher to pay for the ammo you used."

Shayne sat up and buttoned up his shirt. He had a feeling his rest was

over for the rest of the night. "One more ounce of compassion, and you'd be canonized. St. Rags," he said, recalling a potent image of himself watching the narc blow away two unarmed drug dealers, "he drove the serpent out of America's garden spot."

"Gee, Red," said Ragland, limping over on his wooden leg and taking Shayne's Camels from his pocket, "between your new fame and your old sense of humor, it's hard to believe you don't have your own beer commercial."

The redhead arched his right eyebrow.

"That's right, Red. I've been following your little exploits in the *News*. Let me tell you as a friend, though, it's getting harder to tell the fact from the fiction." The DEA head torched two Camels and handed Shayne one.

Shayne took it. "Rags, we've got to stop meeting like this. It seems every time we get together a few men, some good and some not so good, die." The detective took a deep drag and tried to shake off his lethargy. "By the way, I appreciate the invitation."

"Invitation? Oh, you mean the subpoena. Hell, I knew you'd show, but the Justice Department won't take my word on anything."

"I told you I'd testify the day I caught up with Givan." Shayne paused as the memory darted back into his consciousness.

His landlord had asked him to talk to Mrs. Espinosa, a woman off Flagler Street who took in laundry. She had poured out her heart, or what she said was left of it, how her youngest, Luis, had started hanging around with the wrong crowd. The detective had tailed Juan to a plant that was processing coca paste just three miles south of the Calder race track.

That evening the redhead, depending on how he looked at it, had been in the wrong or right place. Convinced that some distributors were holding back their profits, the drug don himself, Ricardo Givan, had sent a clear message. In sudden anger he put a .45 to Juan's head and pulled the trigger.

"Ever regret you didn't blow that *coquero* away?" Ragland interrupted.

"I wanted to," Shayne admitted.

"When you finally decide to trust your better instincts, I'll give you a job. \$75,000 per year and all the ammunition you can use."

"As long as the first shot takes out my conscience, huh?"

"A man's conscience shouldn't last any longer than a whore's virginity. You want to make a cool half-million?" He handed Shayne the butt of his .44 magnum. "Blow me away, collect the Columbian bounty, and retire."

"This is all about Givan, isn't it?" Shayne turned his back to the narc and walked to the window.

"Yep. Our Columbian Cowboy gets his day in court in a few hours. We need your testimony to put him away. The federal prosecutor's putting you on the stand at 11:00, he tells me, so I figure I've got to keep you alive for ten more hours at least."

"Forget it. I've done a pretty good job for the last thirty years or so."

"Your luck's run out. In case you don't realize it, you were just ambushed by the Boys from Bogota."

"Amateurs."

"Maybe, but not the attack earlier tonight."

"You followed?"

"Too far behind. Yeah, that was Givan's elite guard. You were lucky."

"What am I worth?"

"If you're hit before your court appearance, the same as me."

Shayne stared out the window, but this time saw only the darkness.

"The worse part is somebody thinks you and I have the same worth."

"Don't kid yourself, Red. Neither of us is anything more than a thorn under Givan's skin, and he'll take us out with no more concern than anyone else would pull the thorn out."

"Maybe wars from now on are going to be fought at home," said Shayne, a touch of melancholy in his voice.

"You're telling me. Since we last met on *Cayo Muerte*, the wholesale price of a kilo of coke has gone up 50% to \$35,000. Take out your wallet. You got anything larger than a twenty in there, and I'll lay out odds you couldn't get at Calder that there's coke impregnated in the fibres."

"Gives the term 'drug money' new meaning."

"Last month we seized one of Givan's warehouses with two tons of the stuff. That's more than we found in all of 1981. It's a \$100 billion business, and it's more powerful than IBM. I'll bet the dealers in Colombia and Bolivia alone have more planes than the Italian air force."

"Are we losing?"

"When civilians who can put these *coqueros* away never reach the witness stand, we are."

Shayne turned around. "Spare me the I'm-only-doing-my-job-and-I-need-your-help routine."

"It's true."

The detective put back on his sports coat. "You've cleared things with the MBPD then?"

Ragland nodded.

"I'd love to take you up on your offer of hospitality. I mean, sharing a room with you and the Three Stooges until late morning is almost as much fun as getting my hemorrhoids lanced."

The top narc lit another Camel. "But."

"But I've got a personal problem I've got to take care of right away."

"Hey, Red, I hate to tell you that your country needs . . ."

"Hold it. Do anything but sing the 'Star-Spangled Banner.'"

Ragland sliced the air with his cigarette. "Hey, your little honey's O.K. I convinced her a little while ago to take a paraffin test."

"They don't use paraffin any more."

"A nitrate solution, but you get the picture."

"Too well. I think you're the one missing it. The trail gets colder the longer I wait."

"Hey, if you're sniffing after Sabal's little enchilada, we've got the city closed up."

"You don't know Veronique like I do. She could hitch a ride in a camper, and this time tomorrow be in Atlanta."

"I doubt it. We've got all of Mamba's assets tied up. She can't touch them."

"Mamba?" said the detective with surprise. "You knew Sabal was an international assassin?"

"The Federal Strike Force has computers in Washington that do nothing but monitor the progress of guys like that. How would you like to know what Qaddafi Duck is doing at this very moment?"

"Did anyone ever tell you that you have a certain amount of intensity?"

"Don't try to butter me up, Red. You're staying out of the ring for the next ten rounds."

Shayne walked toward him. Deliberately brushing Ragland's shoulder, he opened the door.

A trio of men in three-piece suits stood in his way.

"Ragland," said the rawboned redhead, "tell Moe, Curly, and Larry to move it or lose it."

Ragland clumped forward, accenting his handicap. "I've said it before and I'll say it again, Red. I may have a wooden leg, but I can still kick ass."

1:18 A.M.

FLANKED BY THE THREE STOOGES AND RAGLAND, Shayne walked out of the MBPD. He felt like he had just been inducted.

"I know there's no way to keep you confined in a room," said Ragland. "Besides, stationary targets are so easy to pop. I thought I'd take you with me on a little field trip."

They climbed into a dark-green sedan. "I see you and Givan have similar tastes in cars," said the redhead.

"What?"

"This looks like the hitmobile I saw outside the MPD earlier tonight."

Ragland fixed his eyes on the detective. "Red, if I had hit you tonight, right now you'd be travelling vertically."

As the car pulled away from the curb, Shayne said, "Where are we going?"

"A little recon." The sedan slid into a side street.

"Taking the scenic route?"

"Bounty hunters can't hit what they can't find. A little evasive action never hurts."

As the car continued, the class of neighborhoods began to improve. Shayne now realized they were driving along the bay road, where old money mingled with the new. Only architecture and taste separated the two lifestyles. The old had marble birdbaths and classical statuary, while the nouveau kitsch littered their lawns with twisted metal and bronze nameplates celebrating CASA JOHNSON.

The driver switched off the lights and coasted up behind a large blue van.

"Gee," said the redhead, "I haven't seen one of these since they cancelled *Mission Impossible*."

Ragland didn't respond.

The van's drab exterior belied what was inside. Welcome to 2001, thought Shayne as he climbed aboard behind the top narc. Amidst a flurry of activity stood a battery of electronic gadgetry, most of which he didn't recognize, but he did spot a couple of computers and what resembled some state-of-the-art speakers. Several white-shirted technicians sat before keyboards, obviously responding to what they heard over their headsets. Overhead tape decks spun. Only Captain Kirk was missing.

Ragland reached over to a console and flipped a switch. A green screen lit up. The monitor filled with brightly-colored shapes slightly out of focus.

"What's that?" said Shayne.

Ragland turned. "Let's just call it our Heat-o-vision. Latest thing in enhanced optics. All those red-tinged objects are bodies moving inside Villa Givan over there."

Shayne looked at another screen toward the front of the van. A wide-angle camera gave a shot of a three-story, ultra-contemporary house made of molded stucco and glass surrounded by a gaudy chain-link fence. The landscaping had the unmistakable mark of a recent visit by a nursery.

"How do you like this little shack?" said Ragland. "Givan bought a beautiful, thirty-year-old hacienda a few months ago for some three mill, tore it down, and erected this monstrosity. He even filled it with what they now let pass for art."

Shayne watched the technicians tending to the hardware. One was glued to a green screen with a white sweep-hand that looked like radar. Another screen gave what appeared to be a clear overhead view of the estate. "How'd you get a camera above this place?"

"Our eye in the sky. Not a bad picture for 23,000 miles up," commented Ragland. "Did you know Givan has a little bald spot on the top of his head? Satellite costs 53 K a minute to use."

"A real bargain for us taxpayers," said Shayne. "Don't you think we have a little overkill here?"

"Thirty-seven government agencies are working together on this war. Red, I don't believe you totally appreciate what we're fighting. We're not talking about some army of peasants with pitchforks—the enemy has enough money and contacts to buy the latest technology. But, dammit, let those bastards try to bring down PaxSat III with their freaking SAMs."

"You're going to a lot of trouble to keep an eye on Mr. Givan," said Shayne.

"I'm not letting that creep get away again. He's thumbed his nose at us once too many times. Now he's dead meat. I'm just here to make sure he doesn't jump bail."

"Why didn't Givan skip the country in the first place?" said the detective. "Why risk a trial? Surely a man with his money could afford to run his operation from South America or anywhere safe."

"That's just it," said Ragland. "He paid the ten-million-dollar bail without batting an eye. Said it was petty cash, right to my face. I could even smell his tortilla breath. Then he just came here and sat. Two weeks of pool and party. I knew he wouldn't sit still unless he had an ace in the hole. That's when I started watching you."

"Your concern is touching."

"Then about 6:15 tonight, all hell broke loose. Whitaker called me to say they were streaming out of Rancho Givan like wetbacks leaving Mexico."

A thought formed in Shayne's mind. "You said that Victor Sabal

was suspected of being an international assassin. Could he have been Givan's ace in the hole?"

"Bingo, Red. A bit slow, but you got there. When *Senor Ricardo's* hitman went down, he panicked. Opened the floodgates and let his goons flow out. Now you tell me, Mr. I.Q., how did Givan know Mamba bought it before I did? Hell, the man was shot at 6:00 and Givan had his troops on the streets before 6:30."

Shayne was beginning to see the outlines of a larger plan. "Let me ask you a question. How did Givan find out Sabal was Mamba?"

Ragland pulled out a telephone-directory-sized manuscript. "We've had Givan's phone tapped for quite a while. It seems the two men were old business acquaintances."

"How so?"

"Sabal's real estate business is a front for a Continental money-laundering service. With all his contacts, especially Europe's old-money aristocrats, Sabal exchanged Givan's narcobucks for clean francs, pounds, and lira as easily as you make change to buy the evening newspaper. Givan meant millions to *La Banque Internationale de la Suisse*—that's Sabal's Swiss-based washing machine."

"So you think Sabal agreed to take me out as a little freebie to keep Givan's Transatlantic Pipeline flowing green for him?"

"I'll up my offer to \$95,000—you're thinking like a fed now."

"I can't believe," said Shayne, holding up the transcript, "Givan is stupid enough to talk this over knowing you might be tapping his phone."

"Ego, not stupidity. Yeah, we planted a few bugs in the rancho. Knew he had a de-bugger. Givan thinks all feds wear tight-fitting dunce caps. So, while he stood in the window and waved our bug at us, we got the last laugh. Technology. Our local drug don does his illegal business on his mobile phone through the new cellular network in Miami. For that we didn't need bugs. Some fat nurse at Miami Mercy could listened in on his conversations if she had a police scanner, especially one linked to an IBM like ours."

Shayne knew he had been right earlier. It was a new world out there, so different than it had been when he had gotten started. The image of the detective lurking in the doorstep, always on someone's tail was so antiquated. Of course, how many investigators did he know who could afford \$53,000 a minute to keep tabs on somebody?

"You ready to go in now, Chief?" said one of the Stooges.

Shayne said, "What's he talking about?"

Ragland said, "Your basic pre-dawn hassle."

"How'd you get a warrant this time of night?"

The top narc smiled. "Thanks for reminding me. I certainly don't wish to enter those premises illegally and get those bleeding-hearts upset." He opened a file cabinet. "Whitaker, type in today's date and let's use Judge Hasting's signature for variety's sake."

Shayne was surprised. Ragland's life was totally cornerless—the fed had cut them all. "You're forging a warrant?"

"If you're bleeding about tainted evidence," said the gaunt fed, "don't. I'm just doing this to keep Givan off balance. The best defense is a good offense. You stay here and think of the irony. Givan is scouring the town for you, and you're hiding just outside his gate."

"Chief," called Whitaker, "we got trouble."

"What?"

"I got a bunch of blips heading down the driveway toward us."

Ragland said, "Well, pilgrims, let's head 'em off at the pass."

It was the worst John Wayne imitation Shayne had ever heard.

1:36 A.M.

SHAYNE STARED AT THE GREEN SCREEN. TWO FORCES came together like a series of colored blips on a new video game, Gunfight at the Rancho Givan.

Whitaker said to the redhead, "You want to hear this?"

"Why not."

Whitaker hit a toggle switch.

On another screen the front gate slid open.

"You guys been hanging round too long here," said a voice with a Spanish accent.

"Head back to your rock, maggot," barked Ragland. "We're here to play a little game of Pin the Tail on the Jackass, and guess who the lucky jackass is?"

"You got a warrant, G-man?"

"Six of them," responded the fed.

Whitaker said, "The blue dots on my screen are all M-16's."

"Like the man on the tube says," said Shayne, "'Don't leave home without one.'"

"Look at those greasers run," said Whitaker ebulliently. "Show 'em a little steel and they get weak in their frijoles. This is better than watching those old Cagney movies, and we got it on tape."

The training film of the future, thought the detective as he gently shut the van door. All of the technicians had been too busy watching Ragland's show to see him slip out. Staying on the side of the road, the redhead broke into a trot, then a run. The dewy Bermudà grass muffled his footfalls. He swerved to avoid a man who was letting his Irish setter

fertilize a well-manicured lawn.

Once he reached Collins, he turned south. Even in his loafers and tan slacks he was jogging quite easily now. His breathing wasn't labored, and he felt better than he had in weeks. Nothing like a little exercise to loosen up the machinery.

Less than a mile down the road a *Daily News* van offered him a lift. Reluctantly he took it. He was in a hurry. About a hundred yards from the Buccaneer the van dropped him. He started for the parking lot and the Buick, then paused. Standing in front of the hotel in his orange and navy uniform was a middle-aged doorman who looked like he had just lost his marching band.

"How long you been on duty?" said the redhead as he strolled up.

"Since 8:00 last night."

"Long hours," said Shayne.

"Should be home with my missus, but Carruth never showed. Young kids today are so undependable. Probably stayed out all night trying to boogie, whatever that is."

"I know what you mean." He held up his cigarettes. "That was some battle upstairs earlier tonight."

The doorman took a cigarette. The detective lit it for him.

"I saw them Cubanskis when they drove up," said the doorman. Carrying duffle bags. I got a little worried and called Security, but they were slow as always."

"A little bit after that happened, do you remember a really good-looking woman coming out? Dark hair, white evening gown, light tan . . ."

"Brother, don't get me wrong. I'm a happily married man, but I ain't dead yet. You see one of them like her in a lifetime."

"That's Veronique. Did she have a car?"

"No. She had me hail her a cab."

"Do you remember what company?"

"Course. We got an exclusive contract with Tradewinds."

"Do you know which cab? The driver maybe?"

"No. Guess I was too busy looking at her, but I do recollect what she said to the cabbie when she got in."

"What?"

"You know, as how I drew this double shift I'm a thinking about picking up Shirley—that's my wife—a little gift. The gift shop here's the only thing open, but they're a mite expensive for my taste—if you get my drift."

Shayne laid a twenty in the current.

"Green Cove Marina. Green Cove Marina, and then she was gone."

SHAYNE WHEELED THE BUICK OUT OF THE HOTEL PARKING lot and headed toward Bal Harbour. The Green Cove Marina. Earlier in the week Lucy had mentioned accepting an invitation from Veronique to accompany her and Victor on a boat ride to some new development. Could the boat they had taken been docked at Green Cove? That made sense. Veronique was new to Miami, she had witnessed more than one death tonight, and where else could she go? The Grand Hotel in Coconut Grove was out. Too many people knew where she and Victor had been staying. No, the Marina was a safe bet.

The Buick sped down the nearly-deserted Collins Avenue. In a little while Miami Beach would be coming alive. The cool, early-morning air helped keep the redhead awake as it slapped his stubble-covered face.

Think clearly, he told himself. What had started out as a disagreement with Lucy had mushroomed into a full-fledged case of international proportions. Well, at least she was safe for the time being, but he had to find Veronique. There were a couple of scores to settle. If he had ever questioned his lot in life, perhaps this episode was a reminder. As surely as the old men on the beach were drawn to the metal coins buried in the sand, so he was attracted to trouble lurking beneath the surface of normal human activity.

Maybe he ought to check in with Oliva, to see what he and Jiggy Cheatham had dug up at the Riviera Towers. Remembering what Ragland had said about the cellular phone network, he pulled over and used a pay phone. He was put through to the Homicide lieutenant immediately.

"Gerry, Mike."

"Christ, Mike, where in hell you been? You're harder to find in this town than a virgin. I heard you were involved in that fracas at the Buccaneer, so I called the MBPD, but they said the DEA had sprung you. What's going on?"

"I'll explain it to you later," said the detective. "Why were you trying to get in touch with me?"

"I don't know how to tell you this. Hell, I don't even know how to explain it."

"Explain what?"

"It's Lucy. She's just plain vanished from the lockup."

2:45 A.M.

"What the hell's going on here, Gerry?" said Shayne.

The lieutenant turned toward the door and an angry redhead. "Calm down, Mike."

"I've heard about you guys losing drugs or weapons from the

property room, but dammit, how does a suspect in custody just slip through your fingers?"

Oliva's swarthy face reddened. "Wait just a damn minute. My first thought was that you had something to do with it."

"What are you talking about?"

"Hey, don't come in here as the high and mighty defender of justice. You've cut a few corners before—in your clients' best interest. Hell, everybody knows you and the Chief are tight and how often Gentry's gotten your ass out of a sling."

Shayne's steel-gray eyes were intense. "Listen, Gerry, I told *you* I'd go by the book on Lucy's case. I had nothing to do with her disappearance."

Oliva pulled out his briar pipe and lit up. "It's not going to do Lucy or the blind lady any good if you and I are at each other's throat. If you say you had nothing to do with it, I believe you. Now, how about you easing up a bit?"

Shayne tapped a Camel on his left thumbnail. He knew the smoke would burn his already bloodshot eyes, but he needed the nicotine. "You mean you don't have any idea what happened to her?"

"I'm just as much in the dark as . . . wait a sec." Oliva lit his pipe and let the smoke drift slowly between his teeth. "What about that Perry Mason of yours?"

"Murdock?"

"Yeah. He slunk around here after you left, and come to think of it, I haven't seen him for a couple of hours."

Shayne shook his head. "Take it easy, Sherlock. Murdock is so clean he squeaks when he walks. He wouldn't steal a newspaper from a broken rack, much less break his professional ethics." Shayne stubbed out the barely-smoked butt. "Let's go downstairs."

"Why?"

"You didn't get that gold shield from the Sears catalog. We've got to sniff around the lockup. Surely somebody down there saw something. After all, at this time of the night there can't be that much traffic."

Oliva wiped a drop of sweat from his chin. "I haven't even had time to visit the candy machine tonight."

"Then we'll make time—now, and I don't mean for a Snickers."

OLIVA SNATCHED UP THE CLIPBOARD FROM THE Battered metal desk. "Where in hell is Marty?"

As if on cue, the restroom door opened, and a fat man emerged cinching his belt. "Damn chili," he muttered under his breath. "Every time Ruth serves that stuff I get the runs."

The uniformed man looked up at Oliva. "Lieutenant, what are you doing down in the crypt tonight?"

"Marty, we got a problem. Remember that Hamilton woman I wanted you to bring upstairs for some questions?"

"Yeah. I told you she wasn't here."

"Was she ever brought down?"

"No. Since that big hooker bust earlier, I haven't had much business."

Shayne turned to Oliva. "I take it you didn't bring Lucy down here yourself?"

"No, I started to, but just then Jiggy got back from the Riviera Towers. We started comparing notes, and, well, I pulled one of the uniforms off some paperwork to take her down for me."

"Who was it?" said Shayne.

"Let me see." Oliva closed his eyes. "Roberts? No. Billings? That's it. Ralph Billings."

"Is he still on duty?"

"Should be."

"Was he in the office upstairs just now?"

"Come to think of it, I don't remember seeing him lately." Oliva grabbed the phone and pushed a couple of buttons. "This is Lt. Oliva. Find Ralph Billings and tell him to report to the lockup, pronto."

Five minutes later a skinny cop stepped into the crypt. "You want to see me, Lieutenant?"

"Yeah, Billings. Did you deliver that Hamilton woman to Marty a while ago?"

"No."

"Then what the hell did you do, call her a cab and send her off to the Fontainebleau for cocktails?"

Billings flushed. "The elevator hasn't worked right since the blast in the Chief's office, so I decided to take the west stairs. Well, the woman and I had just hit the second landing when I heard someone yell stop."

Oliva shifted his weight. "Billings, I don't want an epic tale. Just get to the point."

Shayne interrupted. "Who told you to stop?"

"Your partner, Lieutenant," said Billings.

Oliva froze. "Jiggy?"

"Yeah, he said he had a few more questions for the woman and sent me down to records to double-check if she had a yellow sheet."

"Did Cheatham leave you right after he returned?" Shayne said to Oliva.

"Yeah. Said he had some business to take care of. I thought he

meant the john. Sorry, Marty. I guess I got so caught up with all my paperwork that I just didn't notice that he hadn't come back."

"Where would Cheatham have taken Lucy to question her?" Shayne said.

"You know the set-up. We've got a couple of interrogation rooms," said the lieutenant. "Guess I'd better make a few calls."

Shayne had some bad vibes. Without a word he headed for the stairwell.

SERGEANT BROKER WAS READING A COPY OF *PSYCHOLOGY Today* as the detective approached. "Hello, Shayne," he said without looking up. "Did you know that taking a sauna can kill all your sperm for a whole week?"

"Probably why Japanese couples have so few kids," said the redhead.

"Yeah. Never thought of it that way," said the sergeant on the desk.

"Tell me, Stu, did you see my secretary tonight?"

"Twice. Once when they brought her in and once when they took her out."

"Who took her out?"

"Jiggy Cheatham. About an hour ago," said Broker. "Something wrong?"

"Yeah," said Shayne.

Oliva came through the stairwell door. "Mike, she's not in any of the interrogation rooms or booking. I can't even find Jiggy."

Shayne's bad vibes were getting strong enough to dance to. Cheatham wouldn't have taken Lucy back to the crime scene this early in the morning. Where would he be going with her? Any destination other than the Riviera meant trouble. "Gerry, I know Cheatham hasn't been your partner long. Where's he come from?"

Oliva looked at the redhead. "Wait a minute. You're not . . ."

"Where?"

"Transferred in from Vice. The guy was a regular supercop there. Had a couple of collars that made the department look really good."

"What kind of busts?"

"Some coke distributors. Between us chickens they were minnows, but the papers made them into sharks, and the brass 'round here ate them up."

The vibes were deafening now. Shayne picked up the phone on Broker's desk. "Six for an outside line?"

"Yeah," said the sergeant.

The redhead dialed his apartment. From inside his sports coat he

pulled his beeper. With a push he activated the new answering machine that had been necessary with all the publicity.

He heard a tone. Then a voice began. "Shayne, you know that little brown package you look for? The one that got lost at the police palace? If you'll come to my place, we'll discuss its return."

The detective didn't have to be told who the Spanish-accented caller was. He had heard the same voice the night that Mrs. Espinosa's son had been murdered.

Lucy had been delivered into the hands of the man who was looking for him.

Ricardo Givan.

3:43 A.M.

NOBODY HAD TO SPELL OUT THE SITUATION FOR SHAYNE. He knew exactly what the cocaine cowboy wanted. He knew too that going to Rancho Givan to try and free his secretary was useless. Ragland had that place shut down tight. Nobody had delivered Lucy there in the last hour or so. Where, then, was the drug don hiding her?

What Givan wanted was equally clear. Leverage. Givan was betting that as long as he had Lucy the redhead would never testify against him. The detective could see it all in his head. The federal courtroom . . . Mike Shayne called to the witness stand . . . the once-eyewitness recalls seeing nothing . . . Givan laughs in Ragland's face—again.

Givan had gone to Plan B. His death squad and his bounty had failed, and now they couldn't find Mike Shayne. Givan had figured the only way to get to him was through his one window of vulnerability, his secretary.

And Givan wasn't the only one.

It hit the detective that the general public knew more about his relationship with Lucy than he had suspected. Maybe Tim's articles had been good for business, but they were hell on his personal life—and Lucy's.

Sure, Givan knew that no matter where he was holed up, he'd find out about Lucy's abduction. No wonder Givan had been home waiting. All he had to do was to get the word out about his captive and wait for the detective to come calling.

Hell, if Givan thought Mike Shayne was going to play by the rules, the czar had a flaw in his game plan. For once the redhead had to agree with Ragland—the best defense is a good offense.

And when it came time to finally score this one, Shayne vowed there was going to be a great big zero beside Givan's name.

"What is it, Mike?" said Oliva. "From the way you're clenching

your teeth, I'd say you just heard something you didn't like."

"Damned straight. We both have a problem, Ger. My secretary's in trouble, and no matter how we slice it, you're responsible for her being there."

Oliva nodded his head without looking at Shayne.

"You with me on this one?" said the detective.

Oliva nodded again.

"The key to our problem is Cheatham. We've got to find him—immediately."

"You're sure he's gone over?"

"What do you think? He walked out of here with Lucy. Now Givan's got her. What do you get when you add two and two?"

"A dirty cop." The lieutenant's hand began to squeeze his briar pipe. "I can put up with paper-shufflers. I can live with burned-out guys just putting in time to retirement. But dammit, a dirty cop soils us all. Jiggy looks bad—I look bad."

"You're his partner. Where do you think he might be?"

"He's not with Givan now?"

"Not at Givan's Miami Beach villa. The DEA has that place under seige. Besides, after Cheatham turned over Lucy, his value was gone. He's used toilet paper now, and if Givan hasn't already flushed him, we're lucky. My guess is that if he's not dead, he's trying to get out of Miami."

Oliva smacked his pipe down hard in his palm like a blackjack. "It's a long shot, Mike, but . . ."

"WE USE THIS PLACE AS A SAFE HOUSE. IT'S CHEAP." Oliva pulled the pool car up to the curb.

Shayne looked through the dirty windshield at the office building. It was the kind of structure whose only reason for still standing was a tax write-off, but before the landlord took his paper-only loss, he filled the place with desperate tenants and promises he never intended to keep.

"Second floor," said the cop. "Jiggy and I set up 2B as our safe-house, a place to store witnesses and evidence."

"Nice," said Shayne. "So throw-away guns aren't the only little tricks you guys use."

"As I just found out tonight, you can't trust anybody."

Shayne got out of the car. "Glad to see it's not just bureaucrats and politicians who operate by the prime rule of survival—at all times cover thy own ass."

"You got it."

They stepped over a sleepy wino in the doorway.

"At least you don't have to tip the doorman here," said the detective.

Oliva almost laughed. Three steps behind, Shayne could feel the anger radiating from the cop. The stairs creaked under their weight. From one of the rooms a voice warned monsters to stay away. The redhead stepped on something and picked it up. Surgical tubing, a shooter's armband. The building reeked of smoke, urine, and surrender.

Oliva held up a hand and then put it to his lips. "Walk like you're staggering," he whispered. "The floor's a built-in early-warning system."

A single low-watt bulb revealed brown walls. The cop halted in front of an unmarked door and pulled out a .44. Not standard MPD issue. A swift kick opened the door.

The smell of pot greeted them. Oliva holstered his weapon. Sitting cross-legged on the bed, a bottle in his lap and a joint clipped to his hand, was Cheatham.

"Doing a little undercover work, Jiggy?" said Oliva.

Cheatham's head spun like it was about to go down a drain. "Geraldo, my amigo, I have done something terrible."

"Next to what I'm gonna do to you, partner, it's gonna look terrific."

"You're not mad, are you?" His eyelids seem to fold over his eyeballs. "Who's the gorgeous redhead with you?"

Oliva put his hand on Shayne's chest. "When did you sell out, partner?"

"Two years ago," said Cheatham, taking a hit first from the bottle and then from the grass. "Family doctor said I had skin cancer, so I figured it didn't matter no more. Why do the good guys get cancer, Ger?"

Oliva said to Shayne, "Why don't you watch the hallway to make sure nobody sneaks up on us."

Shayne understood what Oliva meant. He walked back into the corridor and closed the door. Cheatham screamed. The redhead was afraid to light a cigarette. The place would burn to the ground before he could finish it. Wood splintered. Oliva was another of the squeaky cleans. Maybe that's why the two of them got along so well. Hear no evil, see no evil.

Oliva came through the door. "You want to help me carry him out. The guy's so loaded he burned a hole in his cheek and barely felt it."

THE MARQUIS ATOP THE CAMEO THEATRE READ *THE*

WILD BUN H. After turning over what remained of Jiggy Cheatham to a black-and-white, they had parked two blocks away and come through the alleys. By the time they got back to the police sedan, Shayne figured the vehicle would be minus half its equipment, but it was worth it.

According to Cheatham, he had heard Givan's men mention something about the old movie theatre. Like most of the buildings in this section of south Miami, it had been long since closed. For about twenty years, Shayne guessed, unless they were having a Peckinpah revival.

They pulled down the fire escape from a boarded-up Woolworth's next door and climbed to the roof. If the theatre was being guarded, the rooftop was the likely place.

Shayne spotted the cigarette glow in the dark. He was glad he had vetoed Oliva's suggestion to call in the Special Threat Response Unit. First, it would have taken a long time to mobilize the team, and if Givan had bought one cop, there were bound to be a few more rotten apples in the barrel.

The glow was about four feet up and against a chimney. One guard, awake, and sitting. They snaked along the roof till a stairwell opening provided them with cover.

"Give me five minutes, Ger, and then start walking toward him."

Oliva nodded.

"Five minutes . . . now."

Shayne crawled around the opening, then began to slither along the tar roof. When he was directly behind his target, he got to his knees and began to creep. Closer he came, moving slowly enough not to make noise.

Suddenly he stopped. His foot had caught in a drain opening. Less than thirty seconds to go. Oliva was going to walk in blindly and there was no way to stop him.

Shayne strained. The foot wouldn't pull loose from the metal opening. Twenty seconds. He couldn't shout. He couldn't shoot. The noise would alert them.

But Gerry was walking into it.

Five seconds.

Oliva appeared in the half-moonlight.

Shayne grabbed his gun.

The cigarette ash rose to six feet.

Holding his Smith & Wesson by the barrel, Shayne heaved and hoped.

Oliva froze.

The guard raised a shotgun.

The .38 caught him in the shoulder blade, surprising him more than hurting him.

Oliva was on top of the figure.

Less than twenty seconds later Oliva reached out and tugged on the detective's hand. As his foot popped loose, Shayne noticed the blood on Oliva's jacket.

"Guess my knife caught an artery," he said. "Come on."

A half-open door stood behind the dead guard.

"I'll carry you down the stairs piggyback," said Shayne. "That way if they hear footsteps, there'll only be one set."

The stairs creaked as they descended. Dim light showed from the landing. Shayne decided to head toward it. Down the hallway they went.

Without warning several spotlights hit them.

Shayne and Oliva dropped to their knees.

They were in the balcony of the Cameo, and in a split second the red-head counted six shotguns surrounding them.

4:59 A.M.

"MR. GIVAN DID NOT THINK THAT A MAN WITH A REPUTATION like yours would surrender his honor for his senorita," echoed a thickly accented voice.

The spotlights blinding him, Shayne could not tell from what direction the resounding voice had come.

"Mr. Givan said the only way to keep a man like you from having his day in court was to kill you," continued the Hispanic. "Throw your guns over the edge."

The detective knew that the minute he complied, he was dead. But if he decided to try to shoot his way out, he was dead, too.

"Whatever you want to do, Mike," said Oliva.

"Throw them away," urged the unseen voice.

"Let's do as they say. I count at least six barrels, and I don't see Lucy. There's a time for everything, and this is for stalling."

A .38 and a .44 clattered to the theatre floor below. One of the arc-lights was turned off, and another aimed at their feet. Shayne and Oliva stood up. Immediately a set of hands began to pat him down roughly. As his eyes adjusted, the redhead saw the six shotguns were attached to six Hispanics. He wondered how many of them had shot at him earlier in the night.

"Bring in his woman," said the accent who had been speaking earlier.

From behind a torn curtain emerged Lucy Hamilton, her hands tied

and her mouth gagged with two handkerchiefs. Oblivious to the guns Shayne walked over and removed the gag.

"It's been a long night, Angel," said the redhead.

She smiled weakly, her face and courage on the verge of shattering.

"What now?" said Shayne as a shotgun prodded Oliva next to him.

"A long ride to a place where all the federal marshals will not be able to find you."

"Well, Shayne," said Oliva, forcing a grim smile, "it's not exactly how I pictured my exit."

"Hold it, Pedro," boomed a familiar voice.

Unable to locate the speaker, the six Hispanics pointed their shotguns around wildly.

"Lay the hardware on the floor, *caballeros*. I'm not going to tell you a second time."

Shayne recognized the deep voice of Ragland.

One of his captors fired wildly. An answering head shot dropped him instantly.

The leader grabbed Lucy around the neck. "I'll kill her."

Shayne looked at the cold steel barrel.

"Be my guest. It'll just give us something else to put you away for. By the way, my name is Ragland of the DEA. Perhaps your boss has spoken fondly of me."

"Ragland," said one of the captors.

"I'm not in the hostage-negotiation business," said the top narc. "All I want is your boss. Whoever these civilians are, they're nothing more than some future body count."

The Hispanics all glanced around, looking for a sign.

They got one. A single rifle shot reduced them to a quartet.

Four shotguns dropped to the floor. Shayne picked up one without a stock, placed it in the mouth of the leader, and waited for government agents.

The loud clip-clop announced Ragland's entrance. A dozen men, some with M-16's and a few with Uzi's, appeared. They patted down the Hispanics, removing several pistols and a horde of knives.

Shayne pulled Lucy close to him. He could feel her pulse driving against her chest like an out-of-control piston.

"Easiest way to catch the wolf," said Ragland, "is to give the lamb a long tether."

"Is that lamb as in sacrificial lamb?" said the redhead.

"Hey," said the fed, "do you think I'd really leave my star witness unprotected? Come on, didn't you think it was awfully easy even for you to escape from the van?"

Oliva said, "What I want to know is would you really have let them shoot us?"

Shayne answered. "*Let* isn't the word, Ger. How about *encouraged*?"

"What are you talking about?" said the MPD lieutenant in disbelief.

"Ragland thinks a little different from normal human beings," said Shayne. "All he's got in this morning's trial is one witness. But, if these jerk-offs blow the three of us away on Givan's orders, he's got a squad of trusty narcs as witnesses."

"Enough to firm up Givan's date with an electrocutioner," finished Ragland.

"Oh my God," said Lucy, "I don't believe it."

"Jenkins," said Ragland, "I need an early-morning object lesson. One of these bozos is trying to escape. Throw him over the edge of the balcony."

The eyes of the Hispanics swiveled nervously. Ragland's lieutenant grabbed one. The guy resisted. Jenkins caught him across the face with his shotgun barrel. Two other DEA's picked him up and threw him over the edge as if doing no more than tossing a rotten tomato at a bad performer on the stage.

The body landed with a scream and a crack. Shayne peered over the edge. The Hispanic was clutching his ankle.

Ragland said to the others, "I need at least two of you to testify against Givan. All volunteers take one step forward."

None did.

"I'm gonna give you one more chance," said the top narc. He reached into his raincoat and pulled out a grenade. Holding it above his head so all could see, he said, "When I was a kid, Pedros, I used to play a game called hot potato." He leaned over the edge and looked at the Hispanic who sat grimacing on the theatre floor. "Hey, you, ever catch a hot pineapple?"

Ragland pulled the pin and dropped it over the edge. Everyone scattered for cover.

"I talk," said one Hispanic.

"Me testify," said another.

Lying in an entrance to the balcony, Shayne heard Ragland say, "It was only a dud."

That was seconds before the explosion from below.

THERE WASN'T EVEN A LOCKED GATE AT THE GREEN COVE Marina as the Buick drove through. To the east the sun peeped over the horizon, and the first ray in a long time caught the redhead's eye. Rag-

land had taken the remaining trio—"The Singing Banditos," he had called them—to a federal detention center. From there the fed was headed to Rancho Givan. The drug don was to be put into immediate custody, for as soon as he found out about this morning's activities, he was sure to try to leave the country.

Shayne had driven Oliva and Lucy back to the MPD. Gerry had said he didn't like it, but she was still under arrest. He had a lot of paperwork to do on Jiggy Cheatham, but he'd make sure she had no court date this morning. Lucy was still worried about Ronnie, but the redhead was more concerned with his secretary. Despite a helluva night's work, she was in just as bad a shape as she had been twelve hours ago legally—and worse, emotionally.

The Marina was starting to come alive with fishermen. The pleasure-boaters wouldn't be out for another couple of hours. A couple of questions brought the redhead the information that a cabin cruiser rented to Victor Sabal lay in the last slip on Pier Seven.

Shayne started down the wooden planks. It was a trip he had begun years ago. St. Louis. The last time he had gone after her.

He put one foot on the bow of the boat.

The single shot whistled by his head.

6:48 A.M.

SHAYNE DROPPED TO THE DECK. HUGGING THE BOAT, HE circled around to the port side. Whoever was doing the shooting wouldn't be able to tell if he had been hit without coming out to check.

The redhead crouched behind a padlocked tackle box on the wharf. Tentative footsteps sounded above him.

A figure with a pistol appeared on the foredeck.

"Freeze," shouted the detective, pointing his .38 out from behind his cover.

It was Veronique.

She spun and fired.

The bullet cored into the tackle box.

Grabbing a gaff leaning against the wooden box, Shayne hurled it at her.

She screamed.

Blood spurted from her wrist, and the gun rattled on the hardwood deck.

Shayne leaped aboard and shoved her back against the cabin door. "What in hell is wrong with you?" he screamed.

"Oh my God, Mike. It's you."

"Are you trying to tell me you didn't recognize me?"

"I never got a clear look at your face. I heard footsteps and thought it was those guys at the Buccaneer again." She began to cry. "Ever since I saw you I haven't been very rational. I've been hiding like some hunted animal. I knew it was just a matter of time before Victor's associates found me. Mike, you've got to believe me."

The redhead returned his .38 to the small of his back. Pulling a handkerchief from his sports coat pocket, he wrapped it around the wound. "Let's go. I may have hit an artery. You're going to lose a lot of blood and feel awfully woozy for a while."

"Do you think it'll leave a scar?"

"If it does, lady, the scales'll be balanced between us."

She stood up slowly, her knees shaking. "Does this give you a feeling of *deja vu*?"

"This isn't St. Louis and it's not the same."

"No? Haven't you come to take me back?"

"Yeah, but not to your father, and this time you're going to tell the truth."

"Mike, you never did understand why I had to lie to the police."

"How could you expect me to? After all, I had to spend a night in the St. Louis jail charged with attempted rape of a minor."

"I couldn't go back with you, not to Daddy. I had to do anything to prevent that."

"If your father hadn't come up the river and backed up my story about being hired to return you, right now I'd be in a Missouri prison."

"I was seventeen then. I didn't realize the consequences of what I'd done."

"That still seems to be a problem. Let's go."

"Mike, you said that it left a scar. Were you speaking metaphorically?"

Without a word Shayne unbuttoned the wrinkled button-down, revealing a two-inch crescent on his right shoulder. "Does that look like a metaphor, lady?"

She shook her head. "You can't keep hating me. Haven't you ever heard of forgiveness?"

"Not for someone with a cajun pig-sticker." He tugged on her arm.

She refused to move. "Have you told Lucy about us?"

"Not everything."

"I'll go back. I'll show you I've changed. I'll tell the truth about Victor's death. Please, just don't tell Lucy about what happened years ago. I couldn't stand the look in her eyes. You know, she's about the only friend I've ever had."

Shayne looked down at the red-stained handkerchief. "Maybe the

blood's appropriate."

"Why?"

"Isn't that how you're supposed to bargain with the Devil?"

LUCY THREW HER ARMS AROUND THE DARK-HAIRED woman. "Thanks, Ronnie. I knew you'd come through."

Veronique smiled over her shoulder. "What are old friends for?"

Lt. Oliva turned to Matt Murdock. "Well, counsellor, what are you going to do with your free morning? With Ms. Dessaint's testimony corroborating Lucy's, we can kick your client loose."

Lucy said, "But what about Ronnie?"

"I'd advise her to get a lawyer of her own," said Oliva. "Then find a place to stay. We'll have to go through the procedure, but I don't see even the most gung-ho, young A.D.A. taking this one to trial."

The brunette turned to her old friend. "Need a room, roomie?"

Shayne watched the two women as they hugged each other. He hadn't signed his name in blood, and before this was over Lucy would have to know the truth.

Suddenly the door flew open and in strode Ragland.

"A typical narc knock," said Shayne.

"I'd hoped I'd seen the last of you, fragger," said Oliva.

"Hey, Lieutenant," said the top narc, "if you want to prosper on the street, take your next paycheck and buy yourself a copy of Machiavelli."

Oliva started toward Ragland. Shayne reached out and grabbed him. "Hold it, Ger."

"Come on, Shayne," said the DEA head, "we got a date."

"You're not my type," said the detective.

"It's past 9:00," said the fed, "and I've been up all night. We're going down to the courthouse and wait for our 11:00 appointment with Her Honor."

Shayne pulled Oliva aside. "Ger, this is important. When you're through questioning here, bring the two women to the courthouse."

"But," said the lieutenant.

"No time for explanations," said the redhead. "Just don't let them out of your sight."

"O.K., Mike."

"Hurry up, Red," interrupted Ragland. "We don't want to stand up Judge Feinstein."

SHAYNE PUT THE BORROWED ELECTRIC RAZOR DOWN. Ragland handed him the newly-pressed sportscoat and almost matching

tie. The top narc had told him to clean up before testifying. The detective laughed at the irony—an amoral brute like Ragland worried about the impression looks would make on a judge. “You think this room is secure?” he said to the pacing fed. “You’ve got a man every three feet.”

“Yeah,” said Ragland, “and I’ve got two outside this door. And you know what, Red? Right through there”—he pointed to an interior door—“I’ve stashed Givan and there are six more guys keeping him company. Besides, this is the Federal Court building.” He looked at his watch. “You just remember what the federal prosecutor told you. Thirteen minutes to showtime.”

“I’d say ‘break a leg,’” said Shayne, “but you probably would.”

“Two or three if it would put away the laughing Latin in there.”

A knock sounded on the outside door. Jenkins entered. “That Lieutenant Oliva is out here with those two broads. What do you want me to do with them?”

“What in hell are they doing here?” said Ragland.

“I told Gerry to bring them by,” said Shayne.

“And who appointed you the director of this little scenario?”

“Sir?” said Jenkins.

“Oh hell,” said Ragland. “Bring them in. If it will keep my chief witness loose.”

Jenkins returned with the trio.

Shayne noticed Lucy had had time to put her makeup on. As she stood smiling next to her old friend, he found it difficult to believe she had always considered herself the less beautiful of the two.

“Mike,” said Oliva, “I’ve got to go. Chief Gentry’s got my captain under the gun over the Cheatham mess.”

“Thanks, Ger,” said Shayne to the departing cop.

Ragland turned to the redhead. “You about ready?”

Shayne nodded.

“Jenkins,” said Ragland, “see if Givan’s lawyer is through next door. And watch your piece. We don’t want to make the wrong impression on all the good citizens around here.”

The hairs on Shayne’s neck bristled.

Suddenly, for the first time he saw the last week clearly.

He lunged across the room.

He was too late.

As Jenkins stepped past the two women, Veronique smiled at him. Her right hand snatched his .38 from its belt holster and in a single motion brought it to Lucy’s temple. “Nobody moves but Jenkins.” Her voice was urgent, but devoid of emotion.

Shayne froze.

"What the hell?" said Ragland, his jaw dropping.

Veronique motioned to Jenkins. "Get Givan in here, and don't let anybody over there know why."

"Mike?" said Lucy.

"Sir?" said Jenkins.

"You've got ten seconds," said Veronique. "Then her brains are scrambled eggs."

"Do it," ordered Ragland, "just as she says."

"My error," said Shayne, knowing fully what he had sensed about Veronique, why he had not wanted Oliva to leave Lucy alone.

"Why?" said Ragland.

"I should have seen it earlier," said the detective.

"Seen what?" said his secretary.

Givan came through the door ahead of Jenkins.

"The female viper," said Shayne, "will kill you just like the male. Isn't that right, Mamba?"

"What?" said Ragland.

"After Daddy," said Veronique unemotionally, "it got easier."

Lucy blanched.

Startled, Givan said, "You mean I contracted with a bitch to take out Shayne?"

"And damned near screwed it up by sending all your pigs to get him. I was seconds from killing him at the Buccaneer. The contract was just to make certain that Mike Shayne didn't testify."

"But I thought Sabal was Mamba."

"Victor was the best cover I could buy after losing my second husband. I left just enough evidence so that if the law closed in, I could give him up. Poor innocent Veronique. Who would believe she could kill?"

Lucy said, "That's why she knew all about the victims being shot in the forehead when no one else did."

Shayne said, "Angel, when you told me about her reaction on Victor's death—'What's wrong? You sound like I shot the wrong man'—I should have seen how illogical her response was. There was only one reason she could have thought so—if she had set the whole Riviera Towers charade up to kill me. And she had even given herself an alibi. Lucy would back up that she thought it was Victor."

"But Victor came through the door first," said Veronique. "Who'd have thought the love-sick slob would follow me back from the Grand Hotel when I went and got his gun." She turned to Givan. "I always complete my contracts. Did you deposit the money in that Swiss

bank?"

"No. The job wasn't done and I thought Mamba was dead."

"You ass," said the dark-haired beauty. "My cover's blown and I've got nothing to show for it. Well, maybe something." Casually she swung the .38 in Givan's direction and pulled the trigger.

A volcano of blood and flesh erupted from the hole in the drug don's forehead.

At the same instant Veronique's attention had shifted to Givan, Ragland pulled out his .44 from its cut-away holster.

The dark-haired woman spotted his action.

Ragland pulled the trigger.

Veronique's head, just over Lucy's right shoulder, burst apart like a pumpkin with firecrackers inside.

Lucy screamed.

Shayne watched his secretary's hands scrape wildly across her dress. The fragments of bone and flesh seemed a fire she was trying to brush off.

He cradled the brunette in his massive arms.

"Oh, Michael," she managed between sobs, "say this isn't happening. Oh God, tell me."

Shayne just held her tightly and wished he could.

YOU MAY HAVE ALREADY WON ONE MILLION DOLLARS!

While you're waiting to find out, here's a puzzle for you to solve. It's a fairly simple substitution cypher, with one variation, of a palindrome—a sentence that reads the same backwards as forwards.

ANA PAQ MAP ADA

PAM QAP ANA

Get the right answer and you'll win The Biggest Prize of All—the satisfaction of knowing you're a pretty smart person!

The following manuscript was written many years ago, but because of the delicate nature of the contents I have not been able to have it released.

My grandmother's cousin, Mary Morstan Watson gave the above mentioned manuscript, plus another one, to my grandmother with the explicit instructions not to reveal either's contents until all those which they might harm are no longer living. She feared, should either story make its way to the Strand, that names held in high esteem would be irreparably damaged.

These pages reveal one of the often mentioned but never published stories of Sherlock Holmes, chronicled by his loyal friend Dr. John H. Watson.

—M. Wade

The Red Leech

by JOHN H. WATSON, M.D.

edited by MARYAM WADE

WE HAD JUST FINISHED ONE OF MRS. HUDSON'S FINEST breakfasts: a rasher of bacon, biscuits, and coddled eggs. Holmes was in an unusually good spirit. His many cases of late and the discontinuance of his most odious habit had given 221B Baker Street a most enlightened air.

My dear wife Mary was visiting her sister in Devonshire for a fortnight and not liking the emptiness of our apartment, I migrated back to the Baker Street address hoping to catch up on putting Holmes' exploits once again to paper.

"It's good to have you back, Watson," declared Holmes with genuine warmth. "But are you sure your patients can deal without you?"

"You needn't worry, Holmes," said I. "As of late my practice has been rather slow. Mary suggested that I take a much needed rest, so here I am."

Having thoroughly read several newspapers, and attaching a clipping to his scrapbook, Holmes looked up and stared out the window with an unreadable mask on his face. He was not a man prone to day dreaming, however, there was a wistfulness, perhaps of remembering times past.

"Ah, Watson," said Holmes, "criminal minds lately are not of the caliber we used to deal with. All lack imagination. Seldom do I encounter even a new idea. No one, of the character of the Colonel, or Milverton, or even Stapleton. But whoa, what brings Mrs. Hudson up here this time of day?"

"I say Holmes, but what—" I began, having heard nothing, but was stopped by the sound of a knock on the door.

"Come in, Mrs. Hudson," requested Holmes.

"Begging your pardon, sir," said Mrs. Hudson coming into the room, "but this message was just given to me by a young lad who did na wait for an answer."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hudson," replied Holmes.

"You're quite welcome sir," returned our landlady as she turned to leave.

"Oh, and Mrs. Hudson," spoke Holmes, "I am looking forward to your stuffed mackerel for supper."

"Upon my word, sir," replied the bewildered Mrs. Hudson. "How on earth did you know that I was preparing stuffed mackerel for the evening meal?"

"Quite simple really!" stated Holmes. "Rain has drizzled for the past two days. If you had gone out for any length of time you would have put on your overcape. The water spots on your hem show that you did not, so one would assume that you stepped out quickly and in haste. Surely this is Wednesday and the day when the fish cart comes by with the fresh mackerel. To make my assumption one hundred percent correct one just has to notice the iridescent fish scale above your left elbow. Am I correct, Mrs. Hudson?"

"Aye, you are, Mr. Holmes. Aye you are!" said Mrs. Hudson, as she backed out of the door and pulled it to.

"Well, Watson," said my companion, upon reading the message that the landlady left. "It looks as if we shall have a visitor at half past seven this evening."

"And what, if anything can you discern from this short, simple mes-

sage, about our would be visitor?" I inquired.

"Only that he is well-bred, left-handed, nervous, and taking to drink."

"Really now, Holmes," I declared, "you have shown your prowess before, but pray tell, how do you gather such an abundance of information from just a few short words."

"Quite simple, Watson," he said as he turned toward me from packing his pipe at the mantel. "Take the paper for instance. Heavy paper with an indelible water mark. Not the type for a poor man to have in his secretary. The letters are dark and heavy, with a boldness that suggests a man, and the slant tells me that he is left handed. The words are written carelessly and in haste, and the paper is spotted and has a definite odor of whiskey. A calm man with no urgent problems would have no need of drink this early in the day."

"Amazing, Holmes. Simply amazing!" Never did I cease to be in awe of Holmes' ability to produce fact from what others could not see.

THE DAY PASSED SWIFTLY, AND AT PROMPTLY HALF PAST seven Mrs. Hudson showed our guest into the sitting room.

Our visitor was a tall gentleman handsomely, if somewhat somberly, dressed. I would have guessed him to be in the middle forties of age, but true to Holmes prediction, he had many nervous gestures.

"Good evening, Mr. Holmes," said our guest, "my name is Malcome Weathers. I have a rather urgent matter which I would like to discuss with you, but I have the need for the utmost discretion."

Finishing his statement he sent a glance in my direction.

"Have no fear, Mr. Weathers," Holmes assured him. "May I introduce you to my dearest friend and colleague, Dr. John Watson. And let me assure you, Dr. Watson is the soul of discretion."

"How do you do, Dr. Watson. Forgive me for being rude, but I am most concerned with an important matter," said Mr. Weathers, wringing his hands.

"Please proceed, Mr. Weathers," said Holmes, settling into the wing backed chair.

"You see, Mr. Holmes, I am the clerk for the Rand-Bloch Shipping Company. We have had several happenings of late that cannot be explained, and we do not wish to bring Scotland Yard into the matter."

As our guest stated his reason for the meeting, Holmes arose from his seat, and absently walked to the window. "Please show our guest to the door, Watson!"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Holmes," cried out Mr. Weathers, "see here now!"

"On the contrary," replied Holmes, "*you* see here. You come here seeking my help, yet you fail to be truthful."

"Very well," said Mr. Weathers, slumping back into his chair dejectedly. "You are absolutely correct. But how did you know?"

Holmes turned to study the defeated stranger before regaining his seat, then said, "The stationery on which you posted your message was quite expensive. Not something a mere clerk could afford. The inclement weather we are having would have spotted a clerk's attire, unless he was able to afford a hansom cab. Or unless he arrived in a coach, which could very well be parked under the lamp across the street."

"Remarkable, Mr. Holmes. You do live up to your reputation," said our guest. "I am Jeffery Rand. Part owner of the Rand-Block shipping company, and I truly do need your help."

"Let us begin again, Mr. Rand," said Holmes as he packed shag from the Persian slipper into his pipe.

"Some months ago, we began shipping cinchona from South America," began Mr. Rand.

"Excuse me," I interrupted, "did you say cinchona? And was this to be processed into quinine?"

"Yes, Dr. Watson! Most all of our imports deal with pharmaceuticals in some way or another," replied Mr. Rand, who was seemingly less nervous than before.

"Yes, yes, pray continue," said Holmes with an air of impatience.

"Sorry, Mr. Holmes. As I was saying, we began shipping goods from a new port. When the first shipment arrived, a body was found in one of the holds. It had been dead several weeks, but on the face was a mask of ghastly death, frozen for all eternity. Even more horrible was the mark upon the left cheek of the poor wretch. It was like a huge bloody bruise that stretched from ear to chin."

"And the cause of death?" I inquired.

"Well, at the time it was assumed that he had died from the fall in the hold. He was a native, and was probably never missed until the ship was under sail."

"And you didn't believe this to be so?" questioned Holmes.

"I believed it to be true at that time; however, six weeks ago, another body was found dead, and with the same ghastly bruise upon the face. I called in my own private medical authority, and he seemed to think the death was caused by a sort of poison."

"Does your business partner, a Mr. Bloch, I believe, know of these deaths?" asked Holmes.

"Yes, Mr. Holmes," returned Rand, "however, he prefers to treat them as of little importance. He feels that it's probably something con-

cerning the natives, and should be easily passed off."

"How were you able to obtain this valuable shipping port, and cargo?" inquired Holmes, locking and unlocking his long fingers.

"Quite by accident, really," responded Mr. Rand. "My wife, the Lady Barbara Moreland, and I were on a world tour to celebrate our honeymoon, and one of our stops was Sao Luis. It is near the Amazon River basin, and the whole area is abundant with cinchona. We can not keep up with the demand for the production of quinine as men all over the world still are dying like flies with the fever. It is very big business, Mr. Holmes."

"Interesting! And when is the next shipment due in from South America?"

"One is due in tomorrow. Another reason, for my being here. I fear there is more here than just a few feuding natives," stated Mr. Rand, who stood up to take his leave.

"I think that perhaps you are right, Mr. Rand," said Holmes, showing our guest to the door. "Watson and I would be pleased to visit you at your work on the morrow, and we shall see if we can bring something new to light."

"Thank you, Mr. Holmes! Thank you very much, and we shall see you tomorrow," and with those parting words our guest was gone.

"Well, Watson, what do you make of our guest?" asked Holmes. He seemed a bit disturbed, but I could not fathom why.

"Perhaps our Mr. Rand should listen to his partner and not worry over something that is of no great import," I reflected. "Truthfully, I see no real cause for such secrecy as he would have."

"Well, maybe if you knew more of the Moreland name, you could see just cause in having no scandal. They are a very old and noble family, and presently associated with the British treasury," said Holmes. "Well, old chap, I do believe I shall retire for the evening. Good night!"

I found myself alone and pondering what had transpired this evening. It seemed a routine case, compared to some of the past, however, I found it difficult to shake off the heavy feeling of something forboding and malevolent. In my mind I could see a ghastly distorted face with a horrible devil's mark. I knew that sleep would be as elusive as a will-o-the-wisp for me tonight.

MUCH TO MY SURPRISE I SLEPT VERY SOUNDLY AND arose to find that the weather in London was having a temporary respite from the rain and drizzle, but was heavily enshrouded in fog.

Holmes had evidently been up for some time, for as I approached the

dining table, I noticed that he was finishing up his after-breakfast coffee and the London Times.

"Good morning, Holmes," I offered, ringing the bell to signal Mrs. Hudson that I was ready for my breakfast.

"Good day, old chap! Did you sleep well," returned Holmes, "or did the events of last evening prey on your mind?"

"Quite the contrary," I replied. "I slept exceedingly well."

"Good, Watson, for I fear we have quite a curious day ahead of us. And do remember to bring your revolver. We could be dealing with certain evil elements and may have need for it."

"Of course, Holmes," I agreed, "and I must admit I would very much like to see one of those bruises that Rand mentioned."

Holmes had arranged to have a hansom waiting for us, and in no time we were making our way across London toward the docking area, close to the mouth of the Thames. The sound of the hoofs upon the cobblestones gave me a calming atmosphere, but the coiled tenseness in Holmes could almost be felt across the cab.

"Holmes, what seems to be the—" I began.

"Listen Watson," barked Holmes, "we are being followed. Every turn, every avenue, we have had a shadow close behind us."

Tapping on the top of the cab, Holmes told the driver to let us out quickly, as soon as we rounded the next corner. We were close to our destination, and upon descending the cab, the hull of the Newington could be seen at its berth. Even through the fog, we could see the sunburst emblem of the Rand-Bloch shipping lines and knew that the object we were seeking had already arrived.

We slowly inched our way along the side of the warehouse, and were within ten feet of the entrance, when rushing hoof beats came toward us at breakneck speed.

"Down, Watson," yelled Holmes, and we both hit the ground at the same time. Bullets whizzed over our heads and then we heard the cab leaving and soon all sounds were swallowed up in the foggy night.

"Quite close, Watson, but I don't think whoever it was will be back. The gun was aimed high, more meant to scare us away than harm us. It would seem that someone would rather we were not here."

We picked our way to the entry, and found that the door was unlocked. Inside, Holmes felt around for a lamp, which he soon had lit. It was the high part of the day, but because of the fog and overcast it looked like late evening.

We moved slowly past crate after crate with words printed in an unfamiliar language on the sides. In a cubbyhole on the far side of the large room burned a small lamp on a high slanted desk.

"Good Lord, Holmes," I exclaimed, for as we walked nearer to the desk, the illumination from our lamp revealed a leg protruding out from behind. We rushed forward to see who, and Holmes said, "Too late, Watson. Someone has paid a visit to Mr. Rand a while before us. I would say that he has been dead for several hours."

"Quite right! And from the gunshot wound on the back of the head, I would say he died instantly," I murmured.

"We need to summon Lestrade from Scotland Yard," said Holmes, "and I must have a look around. Rand was definitely caught unawares. There must be something here that is important enough to necessitate murder."

I left Holmes to survey the warehouse and the surrounding area, while I called a hansom and proceeded to Scotland Yard. Many times over the years Inspector Lestrade had been called in to work with Holmes, and was an effective, although sometimes inept, policeman.

Less than an hour later, we were both traveling back across London to rejoin Holmes. When we came into the shipping warehouse, we at first failed to see my friend, as he was lying flat on his back, staring up at the rows upon rows of stacked crates.

"Holmes, are you alright?" I called.

"Quite alright, old fellow," said he, getting up and dusting himself off. "Good day, Lestrade. I believe we have a murder for you."

"So the doctor was telling me," answered Lestrade, bending over the body of Mr. Rand. "He also tells me that Rand paid you a visit last night. Did he mention that he feared for his life?"

"No, Lestrade. His problem dealt more with the shipment of certain cargos. But tell me does either of you know the meaning of the word VERMELHA? It appears on several of the crates, but always in conjunction with two other words."

"This cargo comes from South America," I theorized excitedly, "it is probably the name of the dock site only written in Spanish."

"Excellent Watson," exclaimed Holmes, "your reasoning is impeccable, however incorrect."

"My guess would be that it means something like danger or some such watch word," piped in Lestrade.

"Remarkable," uttered Holmes.

"You mean that I am right?" asked Lestrade, beaming.

"You are both wrong, but you prove to be a catalyst for my mind," replied Holmes, who had lifted a top crate down and was proceeding to pry off the top. "This cargo originates in Brazil, so the language would be Portuguese and not Spanish. But whoa, what is this?"

Never in my life will I forget the sight of the contents of that crate.

Holmes removed the wooden top only to find another layer of oiled tarp as an inner liner. Finally cutting thru that, we were able to see that the crate labeled SANGUE SSUGA was full of live leeches. Being a doctor, I have encountered patients that still wish to have leeches applied, but in my own practice I refuse to acknowledge any medical benefit from them at all.

"Such vile creatures," whispered Lestrade.

"Yes, but unfortunately, still in demand in some medical circles," intoned Holmes. "Help me with this next box will you Watson?"

This crate was labeled similarly, only it said SANGUE SSUGA VERMELHA, and the latter word was printed in letters only half the size of the first two. After prying off the top, we found that it also had the same waterproof inner liner. Removing that, we could see that the contents were of the same horrible substance. Only, there were several of the largest leeches I have ever seen, and they were of a deep red hue.

"Look at the size of them red blokes," gasped Lestrade, who took a step back.

"Watson, have you ever seen any leeches this size before?" inquired Holmes.

"Never!" I replied. "They must be six to eight inches long, each one of them."

"Yes, and quite dead!" retorted Holmes.

Upon further examination, Holmes' statement proved to be absolutely correct. All of the giant red leeches were dead, yet all of the smaller black creatures were perfectly healthy and alive.

We examined several other crates and the contents were found to be the same as the first. Lestrade escorted the body of Jeffery Rand to Scotland Yard, and promised to notify the Lady Barbara Rand of her husband's untimely demise.

I hailed a hansom cab which delivered us back to Baker Street. During the ride back I had contemplated the grisly circumstances of the afternoon, while Holmes busied himself with making a note. The note he then posted with the driver of the cab.

"There Watson, that should bring some results before the day is over."

I wasn't sure that I was ready for any more surprises this day, but neither had I long to wait.

SUPPER WAS A QUIET MEAL WHICH HOLMES ATE VERY little of. After the table had been cleared away he continually paced back and forth. I knew he waited for someone or something. Probably an answer to the message he sent earlier. At eight o'clock there was a

knock on the door and Holmes was rewarded for his vigilance.

Mrs. Hudson entered at Holmes' command, and was followed by a slightly built gentleman of middle age. He was dressed quite elegantly and entered the room with evident ease. His graying temples were in major contrast with his jet black hair, and he would have been a striking looking man had he not had such a sharp, fox-like nose. His eyes were a deep brilliant blue, and piercing, almost to the point that I felt he could see into my inner soul.

"Good evening, sir," said Holmes, with sanguine ease and surprised me by his eloquence with the stranger. Frankly the man made me feel a bit uneasy by his presence.

"Good evening, Mr. Holmes," said our visitor, quietly and with much reserve. "I received your message and here I am as requested, but I must say that I don't know how I can help in this matter of Jeffery's death."

"Yes, one hardly knows what to say in circumstances like these," replied Holmes, turning his head toward our guest, his mouth curved to a hard line. "Watson, may I introduce to you Mr. Armand Bloch. He is, or should I say was, the business partner of Jeffery Rand."

The ominous man turned toward me and gave a perfunctory bow of acknowledgement. Before I had a chance to reply, Holmes thrust him with the question of, "Where were you yesterday afternoon, Mr. Bloch?"

"See here, Holmes!" he retorted, aghast, "surely you don't think I had anything to do with murder?"

"Perhaps you should be honest with us and I promise you that it will save a great deal of time," said Holmes, who had placed a chair in front of our visitor and sat nearly knee to knee.

"Mr. Holmes!" spouted our visitor, starting to stand but blocked by Holmes' presence. "I will not stay here and be accused like a common criminal."

"Sit down, Bloch. You are becoming rather tedious. I have proof that the gun you used against Watson and me yesterday was also the murder weapon."

"Oh, No! Mr. Holmes," said Bloch adamantly. "I had nothing to do with the murder of Jeffery Rand."

Immediately Bloch realized that by the denial of one accusation, he had freely admitted the other.

"Very clever, Mr. Holmes. You maneuvered me," said Bloch somewhat deflatedly. "I had heard you were a crafty one, but I underestimated you."

I thought I detected a hint of a smile on my friend's face, quickly re-

placed with an intent stare at our visitor.

"If you did not kill Rand, do you have any idea who it might have been?"

"No sir, I do not! Unless he took a bullet meant for me," said Bloch so earnestly, that I had no reason not to believe him.

"And have you had threats upon your life before?"

"No, Mr. Holmes. But I am a businessman first and foremost. If at times I dealt ruthlessly, so be it, and I have made more than my share of enemies over the years. But Jeffery Rand was a gentleman, if in all honesty a poor businessman. We met some twelve years ago. He was very young and wealthy, and I in need of money but with a score of ideas on how to make money in shipping. We combined our talents and grew very prosperous over the years. No, I know of no one who would harm Jeffery."

"And did you know of the dead natives in the holds of the ships from Sao Luis?"

"They were of no importance," he declared with a wave of his hand, as much to signify that it did not merit taking about. "Probably nothing more than a tribal feud."

"And why sir, did you try to kill Watson and myself?" said Holmes enunciating each word slowly to drive home the question.

"I did not try to kill you, only to scare you off."

"And why, pray tell! What were you afraid we would find?"

"Letters from the Lady Barbara!" said Bloch, barely above a whisper. "She told me that Jeffery had been here the previous evening, and that she was sure he was suspicious of us."

"It would seem Mr. Bloch, that your efforts were for naught. Rand never made mention of any suspicions of that nature. He consulted with me on the matter of the natives' deaths, nothing more. But do you always keep your personal correspondence at your place of business?"

"The Lady Barbara liked to frequent the dock, and the warehouse in particular. She was highly interested in what the company imported. She sent me messages regularly and I couldn't very well take them home, as I am a married man. Perhaps I should have destroyed them, but any part of her I wished to keep always."

"Yes, well, I think that will be all for now," said Holmes, dismissing anything further from Bloch. "Oh, one last item! Watson and I do not propose to charge you with attempted murder as long as you tell no one of this meeting, and see no one for the next few days. I hope to have this matter cleared as quickly as possible."

"You have my word, Mr. Holmes," proclaimed Mr. Bloch, and with that he was gone.

I watched through the window the street below. Our guest had a cab waiting, and soon was headed south and mingling with the night traffic.

"You have been extremely quiet tonight, Watson," Holmes remarked, bringing me back to awareness of my surroundings.

"I did not like that man. He reminded me of a ferret," I replied. "Do you think he was telling the truth?"

"Yes, Watson! He is as much a victim as Jeffery Rand, only in more subtle ways."

I joined Holmes in a pipe before the fire, where we both watched and contemplated the flames with much more intensity than they deserved. Holmes, I am sure was unraveling threads to this mystery, and putting pieces together in his mind, as a child would do with a wooden puzzle. My thoughts were of a more domestic nature. How odd that my life should be located on a fine line of extremes. On the one side was my sweet and gentle Mary. She was a mixture of all the good things in this world: loving, compassionate, and kind. And on the other side were those whom I had come in contact with, by being at the right hand of Sherlock Holmes. The murderers, the forgers, the thieves. And the strangest enigma of all was Holmes himself. He could at times be as hard and harsh as the criminal he followed, yet I knew of no one who was as loyal and as fair.

"What is our next step?" I finally asked of him, breaking the silence.

"Our *last* step, Watson!" he spoke quietly. "Tomorrow we shall take a ride out to Hounslow."

I AWOKE WITH A START AS RARE SUNSHINE CAME BEAMING in through my window, and I couldn't think of a nicer way to start the day. Holmes was already up and dressed and must have anticipated me, for Mrs. Hudson was just bringing in the breakfast tray. We did not tarry after breakfast, and were soon ready to leave when Holmes said, "Do remember to bring along your medical bag, old fellow. We may have need for it," and without further word, we headed below to the waiting hansom cab.

Before heading in the direction of the borough of Hounslow, we made two stops: one was at the Rand-Bloch warehouse, and the other was to pick up Lestrade at Scotland Yard.

In a short time we were in the financial district and heading west, toward the great homes.

"This should be Moreland coming up on our left," said Holmes, as we turned and headed up a neatly groomed private drive. A man-made pond was located directly below the front of the house and it was sur-

rounded by low sweeping willow trees. Ornate marble figures were spaced periodically along a garden wall that circled the back half of the house. The structure of the house was magnificent, but the size alone was breathtaking. At least a hundred people must be employed just to run such a mansion.

The coach halted, and we walked to the side entrance. Our knock was answered by a doorman who asked our business.

"We would like to see the Lady Barbara," said Holmes.

"I'm sorry, sir, but she is not receiving visitors," replied the doorman, a big, burly creature.

"I think she will see us," returned Holmes. "Just give her this note." And he handed the doorman a piece of paper on which he had scribbled two words.

Not three minutes passed before the doorman was back, asking to come in. He led us into a large side room, which was covered on every wall with valuable memorabilia of past ages. Goblets encrusted with jewels, tapestries from the age of the crusades, chain mail, shields with the Moreland coat of arms, and an assortment of swords.

"How do you do, gentlemen!" came a voice, from the door, which made us all turn. Lady Barbara was a lovely vision with dark flowing hair accentuated by the palest yellow morning dress. She was a petite woman with huge dark eyes, which were red rimmed from crying.

"Please accept our apologies for intruding at such a time, Lady Barbara," I proclaimed. "We know that you must be shattered at the loss of your husband. I am Dr. Watson, and this is Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard, and Mr. Sherlock Holmes." Each made a slight bow when presented. We were offered to take a seat, and all complied except Holmes, who continued to walk and examine items from the shelves.

"The Moreland name is quite an old name, is it not, Lady Barbara?" said Holmes, as he hefted an ornate lance carved with white roses along the shaft.

"Why yes, Mr. Holmes!" she replied evenly. "Our family fought alongside the knights of York during the War of Roses. Perhaps using such a weapon as you now hold."

"Why then do you presume to muddy such a noble ancestry?"

"Please leave, Mr. Holmes!" the lady said, as she rose to leave the room.

At Holms' comment, Lestrade and I both had come to our feet in a somehow unconscious attempt to defend the lady's honor.

"Holmes, please!" I shouted. "The lady is in mourning. This is a bit cruel."

"And murder is cruel!" Holmes stated vehemently. At this Lady Barbara stopped and turned toward Holmes, only said nothing, only stared. Her black eyes were shining, not from swimming tears, but from fear.

"Say what you must, Mr. Holmes," said Lady Barbara.

"If you will permit me, I would like to examine the contents of the box which we brought with us. Or are you afraid of what we might find?" Holmes said, as if he was trying to provoke her, but for what reason, I had no idea.

"Go right ahead, Mr. Holmes," she said calmly. "I have no idea what little game you are playing, but I am willing to play along."

"I assure you, Madam, this is no game," he shot back. "Do you speak Portuguese, Lady Barbara?"

"I am afraid that I do not, Mr. Holmes," she said.

"Then you would not happen to know what the words SANGUE SSUGA VERMELHA on this crate mean?"

"Of course not," she countered, but never taking her eyes off the box which Holmes had now removed the wooden top from.

"Just a thought, Lady Barbara. Armand Bloch mentioned that you liked to frequent the warehouse shipping office, and I thought perchance you had learned a few names of cargo from the manifests. Hand me your medical bag would you, Watson?"

I complied with Holmes' request, and he withdrew one of my forceps from my bag. Slowly he unwrapped the inner oil cloth layer, and proceeded to withdraw a large, ugly leech. I quickly peered at the Lady Barbara, ready to offer my assistance in the event that she should feel faint at the sight of such a forbidding creature, but was surprised to note that she stared intently at the vile animal, showing no sign whatever of queasiness.

Holmes placed the leech upon the table, and after extracting a surgical blade from my bag, he made a long incision in the leech's underside. With the forceps he reached in and to the amazement of all who watched, removed the largest and most brilliant emerald that I have ever seen.

"Am I correct in assuming, that all of the large red leeches carry the same cargo?" Holmes asked, looking directly at Lady Barbara.

At first she did not reply, but stood rigid, and looking extremely pale. Finally, in a voice hardly above a whisper she said, "Yes, Mr. Holmes," and would have crumpled to the floor if Lestrade had not reached out and grabbed her. I tried to administer a whiff of salts but was waved away by her flaying hand.

"I am alright. I knew this day would come sooner or later. And I re-

gret nothing!" she replied, having regained her composure, and was looking at each one of us in a remorseless steely glare. She eased herself back into the chair and signaled for us to take seats also. "Do you gentlemen know my father?"

"By name only, madam," said Holmes, and Lestrade and I nodded agreement.

"He is a wonderful man," she continued. "He is the treasurer to the British crown, and has continued to represent the name of Moreland in the highest of circles. However, a little less than two years ago, following some bad advice, he borrowed a large sum of money from the royal treasury. He lost it all, and was to the point of contemplating suicide when Jeffery and I were married. While on honeymoon, I overheard the captain of our ship discussing the fortune in emeralds that could be taken from the Rio Negra valley, if only a selling point could be arranged. One thing led to another and in no time I was profiting enough for father to repay the treasury. All is paid back, and you could prove nothing of what I am telling you."

"And why did you find it necessary to kill Mr. Rand," Holmes asked, as I looked at the Lady aghast. She was such a delicate little flower, it was absurd to think her capable of murder.

"Jeffery did not understand. He was going to expose my father. To Jeffery all is either black or white, good or bad. He did not understand that Moreland has been a proud, noble name for six hundred years and should not have been made a laughing stock for one transgression. Don't you see? I had to kill him!"

I sat dumbfounded at her statement, and Lestrade always the policeman, rose and walked over to her. Ready to escort her to Scotland Yard. Holmes, who had watched the Lady intently, asked, "And the reason for your attentions to Armand Bloch?"

"I needed access to the crates. He was enamored with me and I used it to my best advantage. He knew nothing of the emeralds."

"One last question, Lady Barbara," said Holmes. "Did you know of the bodies in the ship's hold? Mr. Rand described a vicious red mark on the side of their face. Did you know of that?"

"Yes, they were natives, knew of the emeralds, and like all men, Mr. Holmes, subject to greed. They paid the price. The mark of the red leech was used because of their superstition. They fear the leech is the devil incarnate. A small dart treated with curare would produce death with no outward signs. The mark of the red leech was added as a finishing touch in hopes of curbing others' ideas of stealing the emeralds." She said this without the slightest hint of remorse or sorrow.

No one said anything for some moments, then Lestrade asked if the

questioning was ended. A nod from Holmes in the affirmative, and Lestrade led the Lady Barbara out.

Our journey back to Baker Street from Hounslow was a quiet one.

LATER, BEFORE A NICE WARM FIRE, HOLMES AND I SAT near the hearth, and I was able to clear up a few subjects which were on my mind.

"What did you write on your note when the Lady Barbara was seeing no visitors," I asked.

"Two words, Watson! Red leech. I figured that if she knew we were on to her, she would face us pointedly. The Moreland name is after all representative of high honor. Running and cowardice is not one of their failings."

"And what will happen to her now," I asked.

"Newgate has not hanged a woman in many a year, Watson," said he, "and surely not one as noble as the Lady Barbara Rand. We shall keep a watchful eye on the Times. It really is ironic. Some people will go to any length to preserve the nobility and reputation of a proud and ancestral name. Yet to attain this goal, they will sacrifice all that is honorable. Such a paradox, Watson. But, pray tell, is your stay here proving to be exciting enough for you, old fellow?" At which he smiled.

"Quite, Holmes," I replied, with a smile of my own. "Until returning here, I hadn't realized how dull my life had become." At this we both roared with laughter and could probably be heard clear to Charing Cross. ●

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

Maryam Wade (*The Red Leech*):

I'm 38, a senior at Northern Michigan University and hope to have a degree in Political Science by this summer. My favorite authors are Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Jules Verne. My husband is career Air Force, which has given me the opportunity to see the globe first hand, and we have two little girls. I was born and raised in Sandwich, Illinois, as was my husband.

*Johnny Diamond was dead — there was no doubt of that
— but to his thousands of adoring fans he was still there,
entertaining them!*

A Difference Of Degree

by PETER A. SELLERS

KING PULLED HIS CAR TO A STOP IN FRONT OF DIAMOND'S house just as the ambulance drove away. He watched it ease onto the street and drive half a block before switching on its headlights, the siren and the flashing light on its roof remaining silent and dim. Climbing out of his car, King walked to the front door. Two men stopped him there, but they weren't cops so King knew Gore hadn't told anybody yet.

"Yeah?" one of the men said. Both stood with their backs to the big

double doors and their arms folded across their chests.

"King. Gore sent for me."

"Yeah." One of them stepped back and let King in through the door, closing it again immediately.

King stood in the hallway on the deep pile carpet and looked around. He had never liked Diamond's house. There was something about it that reminded King of Diamond himself. It was ornate and expensively furnished, but somehow seemed austere. Busy, but empty.

King looked at the paintings in their heavy gilt frames, lining the walls along the hall and up the big circular staircase where they vanished in the darkness of the second floor.

"King." Gore appeared in the doorway off to the left. Small, round, untidy, and rumped, he looked like a janitor. He looked like he had slept in his suit, but King knew he had been up all night. His call, an hour earlier, had woken King up.

King followed Gore into the room. It was Diamond's trophy room, filled with awards, gold records, and photographs, all of Diamond with one celebrity or another, or accepting some honour.

There was another man in the room, sitting cross legged on the couch, his arms loosely folded, resting in his lap. He smiled at King, but his eyes remained still.

"This is an old friend of mine," Gore said. "John Devereaux. He's a doctor."

Devereaux rose with a smooth uncoiling of limbs. He held out a cool, moist, slender hand. "Hello," he said softly, the word rolling off his tongue like syrup.

King shook hands and nodded. "Doctor, eh? What kind?"

Devereaux smiled without revealing any teeth. "Let's just say I'm in private practise."

Gore chuckled and settled in a big wing chair by the fire. It was early October, but cold. The doctor sank back to the couch. King hesitated, then took a chair opposite Gore.

"When did he die?" King asked, sticking his feet towards the fire and looking at Devereaux.

The doctor shrugged. "Probably around one or two, but the exact time doesn't really matter."

"It does to me, I'm the one who has to feed it to the press."

Gore prodded a big log on the fire with a poker and sent up a shower of sparks.

"How did it happen?" King asked.

"Heart attack, possibly. Perhaps induced by alcohol. Or drugs. Or both. I'd really need an autopsy to discern exactly."

"Was he alone?"

"Oddly, yes. As far as we know."

"What about cops? They're gonna want a full investigation."

Gore still poked and jabbed at the fire. "Leave that to me," he said. He seemed very calm. King had felt sure he would either be in a rage or sick with anxiety.

KING HIMSELF WAS NOT TOO UPSET, BUT THEN HE NEVER cared much for Diamond. He found Diamond abusive and arrogant and not nearly talented enough to deserve all the attention he received. But, King knew, he was partly to blame for Diamond's success. He was responsible for hype, promotion, and building anything connected with Johnny Diamond up to a major international event.

Even so, King didn't have the same vested interest in Diamond that Gore had. King did most of the flak, but Gore ran the show. Without Diamond, King was out of a product to plug, but Gore was out of a burgeoning corporation to run. He seemed too calm for a man who stood to lose a multi-million dollar investment. No one could expect the manager and mentor of one of the top pop idols of his age to be so cool when his star died just one week before he was due to begin a ninety date tour.

King watched Gore, as the shadow and firelight alternated on his face, and waited to hear more. "I don't think they'll bother us much," was all Gore said.

King didn't agree or disagree. "What about the tour?"

"What about it?"

"Now that it's off, what are the losses going to look like?"

Gore set the poker back in the cast iron stand next to the fireplace and settled back in his chair, his fingers steepled under his chin. "There won't be any losses."

"What? How can there be no losses?"

"It's very simple, King. We are not cancelling the tour."

"What?" King looked at him blankly.

"You heard. We open Friday as scheduled."

King knew then why Gore had been so calm and quiet. He had lost his mind. "And just what the hell do you expect to do? Sell out ninety shows with nothing on stage but the microphones?"

Gore shook his head. "We won't need microphones at all."

"Huh?"

Gore smiled. "King," he said, "this was going to be a big tour for Diamond. We think he should try to make it."

"What are you talking about? The man is dead, Gore. Dead."

"Exactly."

Gore and Devereaux watched King with sated looks. The germ of an idea started to grow in King's mind, but he forced it down.

Gore brought it back up. "Remember, King, when Elvis died? Remember the thousands of fans who lined up for hours outside Grace-land in the hope of God knows what? They were all over the place. They needed guards to keep them away. At the funeral. At his grave. Don't you think if each of them was charged five bucks to file through the house and look at the body they would have done it?"

HE WAS SPEAKING VERY SOFTLY, ALMOST IN A WHISPER, leaning forward across the front of the fire towards King. "Sure, there would've been a few who'd refuse. A few who'd be, what, too noble. And there'd be some who'd only go in for free. But most of them would have gone. At five bucks a head. Multiply that by the number of fans Elvis had and you're talking about a hell of a lot of money. How many fans does Diamond have? We won't make a cent less than we would have if Diamond hadn't kicked."

King looked from Gore to Devereaux.

Gore laughed. "When the curtain goes up on Friday night, Diamond will be on stage. Christ, we could put an urn full of his ashes in the spotlight and they'd still pay to see it. Imagine what they'd pay to run their hands through those ashes in the hope that one or two flakes would stick to their sweaty palms." His eyes were wide, reflecting the firelight. He spoke with hushed intensity. "The possibilities are limitless."

"They won't all come up here just to see a corpse," King said, still half convinced Gore was joking.

Gore was out of his chair. "Of course not. That's why the tour is on. When we're finished here, we just close the lid, nail it down, and move somewhere else. People don't just want to see him here, they want to see him everywhere. Every city in this country and half the cities in the world are crawling with Flawless Johnny Diamond fans. There's a market for the guy dead or alive and why the hell should we let it slip through our fingers when we can get him anywhere in the world for the cost of excess baggage and no bitching about the accommodations. No food complaints, no drug busts, no torn up hotels or smashed equipment. It'll be like going on tour with Marie Osmond." He brought his knuckles to his mouth and gnawed. King wasn't sure if it was brought on by the thought of low overhead or Marie Osmond. He hoped it was low overhead. "This is a dream." Gore flung his hands wide. "This is the greatest angle in history, and I'm giving you the chance to promote

it."

"Diamond's dead, Gore," King said again, not sure he wanted to promote anything like it. "In a few days he's going to start to rot. He'll decompose and he'll stink like hell. And I guarantee nobody's going to pay to sit in a concert hall all night just so they can smell some guy decomposing."

Gore chuckled. "That won't happen."

"How are you going to stop it?"

"We'll freeze him." His eyes were wild and his chuckle turned to maniacal laughter directed at the ceiling and ringing through the dark, still room.

King turned to the doctor. "Will that work?"

Devereaux nodded. "It should. It should keep him fresh long enough to serve our purposes."

"Our purposes?"

"Diamond is a star. Even dead, he's going to need a lot of care. The best care."

"The kind of care you can provide?"

Devereaux inclined his head slightly, modestly.

"Gentlemen, shall we drink to the future success of the late Johnny Diamond?" Gore asked, crossing to a mahogany liquor cabinet by the far wall and raising a cut glass decanter of scotch. Twelve years old if it was a day. He poured out three stiff drinks. It tasted like money.

"Where's the body now?" King asked with the scotch sitting warm and golden in his stomach, almost masking the uneasy feeling he felt growing there.

"Safe," Gore said. "We're keeping a very close eye on him until Friday. And then we're going to rock the rock world."

"At least no one will be able to say he died in New Haven," King said.

Gore laughed and drained his glass. He smashed it in the fireplace.

Devereaux and Gore had done a lot of planning in the two hours between the discovery of Diamond's body and Gore's abrupt call to King.

"He's being taken care of right now," Devereaux said, his gaunt face slightly flushed from the scotch and the heat of the fire. "We're storing him in a full length freezer for a day or two. We have somebody working on a special casket for him, with satin lining and mahogany paneling. It's just a fancy freezer really, but then this is a pretty fancy side of beef. That will be his new home." Devereaux smiled. "He'll never get a chance to thaw out."

Gore did a few steps of a jig in front of the fire. "I told you, King, it's perfect. It's an opportunity too good to pass up."

King was still not sure. He pursed his lips and thought about it. "What happens if it bombs?"

"It won't," Gore said. "And if it does, what the hell? Diamond's kicked anyway, so we've got nothing else to lose. And when we win, we win in a very big way. We're going a long way fast with this thing. I want you along on that ride."

"You, me, and Devereaux?"

"That's right," Gore said with a toothy smile. "Right now, the doctor and I have a few more things to take care of. I'll call you when everything's set to go. I'm glad you're with us, King." He ushered King to the front door, leaving the doctor sipping scotch and smiling.

King left the house uncertain whether he was glad to be with them or not.

THE LINE UP WAS ALREADY OVER A BLOCK LONG, CURVING around the corner and out of sight, when King got to the concert hall. The doors weren't slated to open for two hours. Gore had been right. Only a few of the people holding tickets had redeemed them. Others kept them for use at this new exhibit, and an almost infinite supply was available at the door.

From the looks of things, Gore would have no trouble making up for the few returned tickets. King watched the string of people, ranging from their teens to late middle age, shivering in the late fall drizzle. After a moment, he turned down an alley next to the theatre and knocked on a side fire door.

An usher opened the door. "King?" he asked.

"Yes."

The usher stepped back to let King inside. The first thing he noticed was the chill. He shivered involuntarily at finding so little relief from the dampness outside. He wondered if it was real or imagined.

"Chilly in here," the usher said, blowing on his knuckles.

"Yeah. Like a tomb," King said, with a wry smile.

The usher made no comment and King went to find Gore.

Gore was standing on the stage shouting lighting directions to the booth at the back of the auditorium. He could have used the intercom, but when Gore ran a show he wanted everybody to realize it. Behind him stood a waist high platform, eight feet long and draped in floor length black velvet with long candles in ornate candlesticks at each end. It was for Diamond's casket. A freezer cased in dark wood that worked very well.

Gore had experimented by filling it to capacity with bricks of ice cream and, turned up to only half power, it had kept the bricks hard

enough to bend spoons. When they emptied the casket to put Diamond in, Gore started giving bricks away but stopped when he realized people would pay for ice cream that had been kept frozen in the same box that held the remains of Johnny Diamond. He stashed the ice cream in another freezer, waiting for the doors to open.

The lighting man was having trouble getting the right combination of spots on the platform. Gore found fault with every possible variation. Green and yellow would make it look like Diamond had a liver infection. Green and red made it look too much like Christmas, and red and blue too much like a brothel. Plain white was too austere. It would make Diamond look dead.

"He is dead, Gore," King said, stepping from the shadows into the light on the stage.

"Damn it, of course he's dead," Gore snapped. "But we don't want them to know that." He made a great sweeping gesture with his arm, presumably to indicate the mass of humanity.

"I think they already do know," King said, thinking of the thousands of lines of newspaper copy that had been dedicated to the occurrence.

Gore sighed deeply and shook his head. "Of course they know," he said softly. "But when they come in here tonight, all shapes and sizes, all ages, sexes and colours, with their tear stained hankies clenched in their trembling hands, I want them to be able to look down at Johnny Diamond, at perhaps the last pure untarnished idol of this badly tarnished age and I want them to feel a glimmer of hope, faint as it might be. I want them to feel that maybe, while they watch, he'll just sit right up in that coffin and give them a big wink and leap over the side, taking a microphone and giving them the concert of their lives."

Gore placed a hand on King's shoulder. "You see, King, hope is what we're dealing with here. We're just trying to give these people something to pray for. Some spark of light in the great black firmament of life. Hope that something beautiful hasn't really died after all." King was almost sure he saw tears in Gore's eyes.

Suddenly, Gore pulled back and swung towards the lighting booth, yelling, "Okay, you dumb bastard, let's try and get it right this time. I want something mellow and laid back, but not catatonic. Jumping Jesus H. Christ, I could do better with a flashlight than you're doing with those spots, you son of a bitch."

King retreated backstage.

Devereaux was lurking there and he nodded at King and came over to him. "Everything's going very well, King," he said.

"Seems to be. Gore's having a field day."

"He's very excited. This is a very exciting project. Nothing like it has ever been attempted before."

"Freezing people? Sure it has."

"Yes, but we are not merely freezing someone. We are preserving for posterity a legitimate and important slice of twentieth century popular culture."

"Sure. And making a few bucks on the side."

Devereaux smiled. "A mere consequence of our enterprise, King. And don't be so self righteous. You take just as much as we do. And don't ever forget, Gore and I don't need you. We could drop you in a second and there'd be a hundred other publicists clambering for your job. Always remember that. You need us."

"Maybe so, but there's something you shouldn't forget either. You both need Diamond. How's it feel to rely totally on a corpse?"

Devereaux smiled his empty smile. "You can count on them," he said. "They never do anything you don't expect."

"One cold son of a bitch leading another," King thought, the feeling growing that Diamond, Gore, and Devereaux all deserved one another.

To King, it was a difference of degree. He got paid to do a job, but he didn't own a percentage of the body. The thought had crossed his mind that if Gore and Devereaux ever severed their partnership they'd have to divide their assets with a hacksaw. Then, while Diamond's head was playing Poughkeepsie, his genitals would be on display in South Bend, Indiana. "Just make sure he doesn't thaw out, Doc," King said, walking away.

"Don't worry. I plan on taking very good care of our little investment."

THE SHOW WENT VERY WELL. GORE FINALLY DECREED the lighting was acceptable and the doors opened just half an hour late. There was some grumbling from the line up, which now stretched for blocks, that it was probably all a hoax and Diamond wasn't really dead at all, but nobody left.

Once the doors were open, they streamed in for hours, moving past the blown up photographs of landmark events in Diamond's career and the collection of memorabilia in glass covered cases set up in the lobby. Then it was into the auditorium itself, suitably dim as befitted a place of mourning. Filing down the right hand aisle, they climbed the steps to the stage, where Diamond lay in frozen state.

Each spectator was allowed five seconds peering down at the star's icy face before being moved along by two burly guards. All through the evening, recordings of Diamond's greatest hits boomed from the

speakers, even outside so those still waiting could hear. The music, however, was interrupted frequently by Gore, admonishing the crowd to have patience. After all, Diamond was in no hurry to go anywhere.

By the time the last fan had been ushered out the door, Gore was ecstatic. The evening had gone quite smoothly. Lighting and sound problems had all been ironed out and crowd control became the only real concern. Five people, two of them female, had tried to climb into the coffin with Diamond, but the guards restrained them with a minimum of violence. But, aside from those few isolated and minor incidents, there had been no trouble.

King found Gore in the lobby rubbing his hands with pleasure.

"Did you see them, King?" Gore asked with a chuckle.

"I saw them."

"We made a killing."

"That's a good thing to call it."

Gore chuckled again. "And it's going to be like this for the whole tour. The extended tour."

It certainly looked, at the outset, like it would be. For the first month the crowds were phenomenal. In every city, they lined up for blocks.

Near catastrophe struck once when a harrassed baggage clerk accidentally put Diamond on the wrong flight, and sent Gore and his entourage merrily on their way with the body of a butcher named Stanley Minsky. But the error was discovered in time and a few frantic phone calls averted potential disaster.

BUT THE NOVELTY BEGAN TO WEAR OFF AFTER A WHILE.

Crowds grew thinner and the media no longer gave Diamond the coverage or hype Gore felt the show deserved. King did the best he could, but found his own enthusiasm waning as quickly as the media's.

Gore grew moody and petulant, snapping at anyone on the slightest provocation. Devereaux remained as outwardly calm as ever. Diamond showed no signs of thawing out or rotting and the doctor was pleased that his job was well taken care of, although some concern had been generated by the appearance of a slight freezer burn on one of Diamond's cheeks. But a careful application of cosmetics solved that problem.

Gore would pace endlessly backstage as the steadily thinner crowds straggled past his exhibit and mutter to himself as he tried to calculate a new approach. It came to him one night in a dream.

"Diamond will live again," he proclaimed to King with a whimsical smile.

"Huh?" King wondered if the slump in business had finally affected

Gore's mind.

"I had a vision last night. The whole show is too static. It needs to be punched up, given a shot of pizzazz. Something to bring the people back and get those media bastards climbing all over one another for stories and pictures."

"What do you have in mind?" King was almost afraid to ask.

Gore just smiled. "You'll see. The new Flawless Johnny Diamond show debuts in a week." He walked away humming to himself. King shuddered with trepidation.

KING HADN'T SLEPT ALL NIGHT AND, WATCHING THE chill January dawn of the morning Gore had promised to rock the entertainment industry a second time, he felt cold. The snow was ankle deep on the sidewalk and continuing to fall. By seven o'clock, the crowd outside the theatre was larger than any King had seen in weeks. Gore's maddening secrecy on television, radio, and in the press had had the desired effect.

King slipped in the back door and could have sworn he hadn't gone inside. The whole building was like ice. Gore, wrapped in a fur coat and gloves and breathing steam, met King backstage.

"What happened to the furnace?" King asked, hands deep in his overcoat pockets.

"It's been shut off."

"Shut off? What the hell for? It's twenty below out there."

"We had to turn it off. To keep the goods fresh."

"Goods?" King had an image of Gore's new concept being to turn the place into a giant cold cellar full of Diamond's favourite preserves.

"Yes. To keep Diamond solid."

"Diamond? What about the box?"

Gore just smiled and led King to the wing where he could look out over the stage.

Dressed in the silver lame suit adorned with sequins he had made famous, Johnny Diamond stood like a department store mannequin at centre stage. The lights cast alternately ghastly colours on his skin, so obviously pale behind the make-up.

King looked at Gore in horror. "What is this?"

"Quite ingenious, really." Devereaux had crept up behind them on crepe soled shoes and oiled limbs. He startled King. Walking over to Diamond, he said, "He is held up by a thin but very sturdy wire stand which is hidden inside his suit. Legs, back, chest, and arms." He ran a hand up and down Diamond's leg and caressed his belly like a lover. "Feel it for yourself."

King's stomach turned over. "No."

Devereaux smiled and King could have sworn his teeth all ended in sharp points.

"And this isn't where it ends, King," Gore said, excitement in his voice. "The suit's insulated and lined with tiny refrigeration units to help keep him on ice. But wait till you see the best part."

King wasn't sure he wanted to, but Gore waved both arms to the booth at the back and Diamond suddenly lurched into a grotesque twist while the sound system belted over his cover of an old Chubby Checker hit.

"Good God," King said.

"Isn't it great?" Gore cried, his hands raised before him.

Diamond began a passionate boogaloo as a new song started, strangely out of character with the lifeless aspect of his face.

"The wire does it all electronically," Devereaux explained. "It keeps time, causing Diamond to dance. It's a little jerky, not American Bandstand quality, but certainly more entertaining than having him just lie there and look dead. Care to see him frug?"

"I think I'm going to be sick," King said, turning away.

"Don't go, King." Gore put a hand on King's shoulder. "This is the hope I was talking about. People will once again be able to see their idol dancing and performing before them. He has been raised from the dead for one farewell tour. One last great effort for his devoted fans. What you see before you now is only the beginning. By next week there'll be a back up band."

"That's nuts," King said. "What band in their right mind is going to want to play back up to a rock and roll corpse?"

"The kind of band we have won't mind," Gore said.

"And how the hell much do you have to pay them to play second fiddle to a stiff?"

"Nothing at all," Devereaux said with a smile.

King realized then what they had in mind. A dead band for a dead star. "Oh, no," King said, backing away. "This is where it ends for me." He turned away from Gore and Devereaux, ignoring their protests, and went out the back door, leaving the corpse doing the monkey to an audience of empty seats.

FROM A COFFEE SHOP ACROSS THE ROAD, KING WATCHED the crowds file in. After an hour and no diminishing of numbers, he left and trudged back to his hotel room, his decision made.

That night, after the show, King returned to the theatre. Gore was saving on hotel bills by storing Diamond in a room backstage, guarded

of course, but still cheaper than the two bedroom suite Diamond always insisted on. King got into the room by telling the guards he was there on business with Gore. They were the same two who had been at the door of Diamond's house the night he died the first time, and they knew King.

Inside the room, King worked quickly. He raised the lid of the freezer and caught his breath. Diamond seemed to be watching him suspiciously. Ignoring the glassy stare, his hands turning numb with cold and fear, King manoeuvred the rigid corpse free. Opening a window, he dumped the body, with much swearing and very little ceremony, into the alley behind the building. Straightening his tie and taking a deep calming breath, he left the room.

Backing his car into the alley, King picked Diamond up and somehow managed to stuff him into a trunk designed to hold little more than a spare tire. At dawn he was four hours from the city and Diamond was in the heated trunk thawing out like one hundred and eighty pounds of hamburger.

AT NOON, GORE WAS IN THE THEATRE LOBBY WITH Devereaux and both looked tense and upset. King walked up to them and they looked daggers at him.

"I want to talk to you, King," Gore said, turning to walk into the auditorium. King followed and Devereaux brought up the rear.

They took seats in the centre of the great empty auditorium, the three of them side by side with King still in the middle.

"Where's Diamond, King?" Gore asked when they were sitting.

King shook his head. "Out of your reach now, Gore."

"I don't think so, King," Devereaux said with the soft, svelte tones he used when he was trying to be convincing. "I don't think you can keep him from us."

"I do. Because I don't have him anymore."

"What the hell does that mean?" Gore demanded.

"Just that. I had him, but I don't any longer."

"Who does?" Devereaux asked with a fatherly smile, although to King he didn't look like he could ever be anyone's father.

"No one."

"How's he staying frozen?"

"He's not. I've buried him."

"Buried him!"

"It wasn't easy with the ground as hard as it is, but I finally got it done."

Devereaux's eyes went wide and Gore slumped back in his seat shak-

ing the whole row. "You mean he's thawing?"

King nodded. "Slowly, but surely."

"Where is he, King? We have to get him back. He's bread and butter for a hell of a lot of people." Gore turned to Devereaux. "Will he be too far gone?"

Devereaux shook his head. "I don't know. Name your price, King."

"There's no price."

"Where is he, King?" Gore asked, and the way he looked King knew he would dig Diamond up with his bare hands if he had to. King could see Gore kneeling on the ground in a soiled three piece suit, face streaked with sweat, scrabbling in the dirt with cracked blackened nails, fingers worn to the bone, raw and bleeding. Like some crazed, desperate prospector lost in the desert without food or water but still seeking the great rich vein.

"I'm sorry, Gore," King said, rising, "but Diamond gave you enough while he was alive. He was a bastard, but he's dead now and you've got no right to make him stand up and twitch like a spastic mannequin to the tune of old records in front of a bunch of slobbering ghouls just so you can make a buck. I should've done this months ago. This show is over. Find yourselves a live star." He squeezed past Devereaux to the aisle.

"Think it over carefully, King," Devereaux said. "We can make things very uncomfortable for you. And believe me, we will. Unless you tell us where he is. Then we'll pretend this never happened."

"Go to hell."

"Have a heart, King," Gore said, his voice high pitched in pleading. "What the hell am I going to do with four back-up musicians and nobody to back up?"

King sneered. "Drop dead," he said and turned away from them.

As he walked towards the back of the auditorium, Gore said to Devereaux, "What do we tell the people?"

"Tell them Diamond's not feeling well and can't go on tonight. We'll think of something."

THEY DID THINK OF SOMETHING.

The next day, King read in the paper that Bobby "Ace" Freeman had died of a heart attack following a performance the night before. Two weeks later he opened in Toronto. ●

I recalled things as they were before the neighborhood sank into decay, before my wife and son died, before people grew afraid to walk the streets in broad daylight!

A Breath Of New Life

by PATRICK SCAFFETTI

I FIRST DISCOVERED THE UNICORN ANTIQUE SHOP ON THE day the police found Mrs. Ruffino bludgeoned to death in her living room. She was an eighty-four-year-old widow who lived alone three houses down the block from me and probably had less money to give a robber than I did. But she was feeble and vulnerable — an easy hit, as they say — and stealing from her was less trouble than taking candy from the proverbial baby.

After old Mr. Raymond next door shouted the news of Mrs. Ruffino's murder to me from behind his latched screen door, I thought twice about walking to the grocery store on the main street, but I was out of coffee, bread, and bologna — my life staples. Besides, I told myself with forced bravado, no cruel, young hoodlums were going to make me a terrified prisoner in my own house. Better to die on the street than sit back cringing in fear. So, visions of muggings dancing in my head, I set off down the street toward Harper Road where Costelli's Market, the only grocery store in the area, sold its overpriced goods.

The afternoon was warm and sunny, and it felt wonderful to be out of the house and away from the mindless chatter of the television set.

Five minutes later, when I reached the corner, I wasn't even breathing hard. At sixty-eight, I was still in pretty good shape, even though retirement was doing its best to lead me down the same descending path the neighborhood had traveled. At one time, thriving businesses and bustling shoppers had lined Harper Road. Now, all of that was changed. The area was dead, and tons of litter served as its grave blanket. Except for a stray mongrel and a couple of tough-looking teen-agers, not a soul walked the street. Huge sheets of plywood covered building windows, and the only active businesses were bars, pornographic book shops, and an arcade filled with flashing pinball machines and restless kids.

Halfway down the road to Costelli's, I paused before a dilapidated store front and peered up at the weather-beaten sign above the door:

BEN EMERSON'S DRY CLEANING

I had operated that shop for thirty-three years until declining business and repeated break-ins finally drove me out four years before. Squinting up at the peeling letters of my name, I recalled things as they were before the neighborhood sank into decay, before my wife and son died, before people grew afraid to walk the streets in broad daylight.

In many respects, it had been a good thirty-three years, but they were only memories now, more painful to remember than to forget. I did my best to ignore the aching lump in my throat and continued down the block, my once firm step becoming a tired shuffle.

Suddenly, an unfamiliar sight yanked me from my melancholy thoughts and forced me to take notice. In the midst of the closed stores, a freshly painted sign announced:

THE UNICORN ANTIQUE SHOP OLDIES BUT GOODIES

For a second, I feared that senility had set in, but, on closer inspection, I saw that the accordion burglar fence was drawn to the side, and a light shined in the interior of the building. I pushed my face closer to the display window, and, sure enough, the small store was crowded with chairs, tables, headboards, books, chests — just about every type of antique imaginable.

"Well, I'll be damned," I muttered aloud. "Maybe things are start-

ing to look up around here after all."

EAGERLY, I WALKED OVER AND OPENED THE DOOR. Inside, the shop was very quiet. A soothing musty odor filled my nose. I looked around for the proprietor, but the place seemed deserted. "Anybody here?" I called out.

From behind an ancient cash register perched on a wooden counter in the corner, I heard a door opening. A thin, sharp face surrounded by a mass of tangled brown hair appeared. The young man stared at me cautiously as if trying to figure out what the hell I was doing there.

"Hello," I said heartily. "I've stopped in to browse. You know, before my wife passed away five years ago, antiques were our passion. We collected just about everything we could find that was older than we were. Unfortunately, I've had to sell all of the better pieces we had, but I still love to look at antiques."

The young man looked perplexed. "Uh, yeah," he said. "I'll be with you in a minute." Once again he disappeared behind the door.

I hoped that I hadn't come on too strong. After spending so many hours alone, I sometimes went overboard talking when I found someone willing to listen. And I could converse at length about antiques.

I turned my attention back to the contents of the shop. There seemed to be little order to the placement of the items. An old Hepplewhite table was cluttered with tattered magazines, Depression glassware, jewelry boxes, and toys. A torn dime store lampshade partially covered a lovely Tiffany lamp. Cardboard boxes of mildewed clothing and bric-a-brac were stacked against the walls. Quality antiques were carelessly mingled with junk, and many of the price labels on the items struck me as unrealistically high or low.

I decided then and there that I would make the effort to educate the young proprietor as to the value of his merchandise. In a way, I probably hoped that the business would succeed as much as he did. If his shop made money, perhaps other respectable businessmen would return to the neighborhood. I might yet live to see this part of town come alive again. Renaissance, I thought. Rebirth. I felt excitement stirring within me for the first time in months.

On a massive oak desk, I discovered a child's miniature roulette wheel. I spun the wheel and watched the ball bearing under the clear plastic cover click over the numbered slots. It landed on eleven. In my mind, I bet on number eight and twirled the wheel again. The ball bearing stopped on three. A price sticker on the toy read \$2.00. On impulse, I decided to buy it.

Funny, I thought, how in this small shop I should find reminders of

both my passions in life — antiques and gambling. My wife had sparked my interest in antiques, but I'd been born a gambler. When my dry cleaning business was in its prime, Sarah and I would take off two weeks every other year and drive to Las Vegas. I'd always strictly budget my gambling money, and, over the years, I suppose I came out a few thousand dollars in the black.

Those trips were just another memory now. Years back, Sarah and I would spend hours on end discussing the retirement vacations we planned to take. There were so many places Sarah wanted to see and so many casinos I wanted to visit.

But our only son's death and Sarah's long, fatal bout with cancer ruined those dreams. Even if I had still wanted to go alone, there was not enough money. Medical bills, funeral expenses, bankruptcy, and the skyrocketing cost of living all took their toll. I was just an old man now, locked into a run-down, crime-ridden neighborhood. My God, where had the years and the happiness gone?

"Okay, what is it you want?"

I STARTED, NEARLY DROPPING THE ROULETTE WHEEL. The hatchet-faced young man had arrived at my side while I was lost in reverie.

"Oh, I'm still browsing," I said. "You've certainly got quite a variety of items here."

"Yeah, I guess so," he said without enthusiasm. He was tall and thin, dressed in faded blue jeans and a T-shirt portraying a bright green marijuana leaf. I knew the leaf well. My son had often worn a similar T-shirt. In fact, he was wearing it when I found him dead.

"I'm delighted to see new life in the neighborhood," I said. "You must be a brave, optimistic young man. You're not one of those who have lost faith in the city and fled."

He chuckled. "Nope, I never left the city, and I'm not about to. This is where it's at, man."

"This is where it's at," I repeated. "I like that. It has a familiar ring."

"It should," he said. "That saying has probably been around as long as you have."

There was a disturbing lack of respect in his voice, but I decided to overlook it. "You know, I used to run the dry cleaning business down the block. Ben Emerson's my name. The sign is still over the door. You might have noticed it."

"Can't say that I have," he said.

"I closed down four years ago after the area began to change."

He shrugged. "Nothing lasts forever."

"No, you're quite right. By the way, I've told you my name, but I don't know yours."

He hesitated a moment, then limply gripped my extended hand and said, "Rick Carson."

The name stirred something in the back of my mind and left me with an unpleasant feeling. It was probably similar to that of an old customer who failed to pay his bills, I thought.

"You seem to be about the same age as my son," I said. "Tom would have been twenty-six now."

"I'm twenty-seven," he said.

"Perhaps you knew my son then. Tom Emerson. He used to play the clarinet in the high school band."

"Nope," Rick said quickly. "Never heard of him."

"He passed away six years ago."

"That's too bad."

"Drugs," I said. From past experience, I knew that I was about to talk too much, but I couldn't stop myself. Maybe hearing what happened to my son would make some other young person think twice. Or maybe I just wanted to punish myself. "Tom got involved with drugs during his senior year of high school. Glue sniffing, pills, marijuana — I guess he tried them all. He said he didn't want to go on to college or work with me in the business. He wasn't interested in much of anything except sitting around with a bunch of bums and getting stoned, as he called it."

I paused to draw in a deep breath, fighting to control the anger and grief I felt mounting within me.

"Somewhere along the line, he started on heroin and got hooked. He began stealing from his mother and me, from his own parents. Little things at first, then more expensive items. He pawned an antique clock, his mother's jewelry. He took our credit cards. All this to get money for heroin. I tell you, Rick, I watched my son go to hell. Then, one Saturday morning, I found him dead in a corner of the basement with a hypodermic needle dangling from his arm. An overdose. I grieved for the loss of my son, but not for that creature I found dead."

MY VOICE WAS SHAKING WHEN I FINALLY STOPPED TALKING. In my mind's eye, I had the image of Tom sagging against the cement wall like a discarded rag doll. Dirty and emaciated and dead long before the heroin pounded his heart to a halt.

"Rough break," Rick said. "Real rough break."

I nodded. "But enough of the past. This is a time of new beginnings,

not old sorrows. You've opened your shop, and we'll do our best to make it a success."

Rick's eyebrows jerked upwards. "We?" he asked.

"Well, I certainly don't mean to be pushy, Rick, but I managed a business for thirty-three years. Many of those years were quite profitable. You could benefit from my experience, learn from my mistakes. I wouldn't want any money, of course. Just being able to help out would be payment enough for me."

"Yeah, but we never figured that antiques would do much business around here."

"Then why did you open the shop?"

Rick looked confused, then stammered, "W—Well, someday we hope to make money. Uh, like you said before, you gotta have faith in the city."

"Do you have a partner?"

"No." Again the confused expression. "You working for the cops?"

"Of course not," I replied. "Why would you ask something like that?"

"Look, I don't have all day to sit and talk, gramps," Rick said angrily. "Do you want to buy something or not?"

"I'll take this roulette wheel," I said.

I followed Rick to the cash register, troubled by the tone of his words. But, I told myself, he was under a strain opening a new business in a bad section of the city. He had many things to do and think about, much to learn. No wonder he seemed preoccupied and impatient. I promised myself that I'd return to the shop a few days later when he had things more under control. Then, perhaps, he'd be receptive to advice.

As he awkwardly punched the keys on the register, I noticed that he had left the door to the back room open. In sharp contrast to the cluttered shop, the room was clean and orderly. A neat row of cupboards lined one wall, and there was a long metal table beneath them. For some reason, the arrangement reminded me of a pharmacist's work area.

Rick looked up and noticed the direction of my gaze. With a backward kick, he closed the door, then handed me my change. He shoved the roulette wheel over the counter to me. "Okay, gramps. See you around," he said.

As I turned to leave, the front door burst open, and a gangly, deathly pale young man staggered into the shop. He was dressed much like Rick, and his clothes were dirtier, torn and stained. Sweat dripped from his unshaven face, and he wore an expression of deep misery.

"I'm in big trouble, Rick," he gasped, not even glancing at me. "I need a fix bad, real bad. Oh God, do I need a fix bad. I'm sick, man. Real sick. Dying."

"Shut up, for Chrissake," Rick snapped. "Just shut the hell up."

Rick stared at me with hard, cold eyes as I left the shop. Even from outside, I could hear him shouting furiously at the disheveled newcomer.

BAFFLED AND TROUBLED AT WHAT I'D JUST WITNESSED, I headed toward home, then remembered that I had been on my way to the grocery store. I made an about-face. As I walked down Harper Road, I reviewed the last twenty minutes in my mind. It just didn't make any sense. Rick obviously had little business sense, and, even through he ran the shop, he showed no interest in the items he had for sale. He had even confessed that he didn't expect the shop to make money. For the first time, I began to question his claim to faith in the neighborhood.

And the young man who had come into the shop begging for a fix. After years of watching my son rot away, I had no doubt what that meant, and I knew that the area was filled with junkies. But why would anyone go into an antique shop for heroin? How had he known Rick's name?

I was in Costelli's Market, lifting a can of coffee from the shelf, when I finally realized why Rick Carson's name had sounded familiar. The can slipped from my hand and clattered onto the floor. Stupid old man, I thought. How could I ever have forgotten? Years before, I'd overheard my son refer to Rick Carson as his source for drugs, his "main man."

My head reeled as things began to fall into place. Why hadn't I caught on sooner? The signs were so clear. The antique shop was only a front for distributing drugs. Rick or whoever he worked for had probably bought out an estate to stock the shop and rented the building for a song. No wonder Rick seemed indifferent to whether or not the venture succeeded. It didn't matter. The real money was made in the back room packaging and selling drugs. I thought of my son and other young addicts, their parents, the inevitable, heartbreaking chain of events. Seething with sudden fury, I tossed the roulette wheel into a trash container and hurried from Costelli's without buying anything. I headed back down the street. No shuffle now, but an angry, determined stride.

There was a CLOSED sign on the door when I arrived. The interior was dark except for a strip of light coming from the back room. I

knocked loudly on the glass door. Rick Carson emerged from the back room, recognized me, and waved me away. My insistent raps threatened to shatter the glass. Finally, Rick opened the door a crack and hissed, "Can't you read? We're closed."

I shoved against the door, and Rick stepped backwards in surprise. "Pusher," I said. "Scum."

"Are you crazy?"

"Death merchant." I approached him menacingly.

"Get the hell out of here, you old maniac." Rick stepped behind the cluttered Hepplewhite table. "Get out of here or I'll call the cops."

"You won't call the cops unless they're on the payroll, too, you son of a bitch. You sold heroin to my son. Pig."

"So what if I did? Nobody forced him to buy it. That kid of yours couldn't get enough of the stuff. Doesn't say a whole lot for you as a father, does it, gramps?"

"You're trash."

"Look, you don't think I'm in this operation alone, do you? I got a lot of powerful friends backing me up. You don't know what you're messing with."

Without warning, Rick hurled a book. It hit me on the side of the face. I leaned against the table for support, and my fingertips brushed metal. I glanced down and spotted a tarnished bronze fireplace poker. I grasped the heavy rod and swung across the table. The poker struck Rick on the temple, opening a bloody gash. As he crumpled to the floor, I rushed around the table and wildly hit him again and again. When I was exhausted, the poker slipped from my hands. It was a lovely antique with an ornate handle. Never was so much used to accomplish so little, I thought bitterly.

THEN THE FULL REALIZATION OF WHAT I HAD DONE enveloped me. Horror-stricken, I looked out the front window and saw that the street was empty. As my breathing gradually returned to normal, a crazy idea began to take shape in my mind. A crazy idea that somehow seemed the most logical thing on earth. Quickly, I locked the door and went into the back room. On the long table, there were several glassine envelopes filled with what looked like flour. "Nickel bags," Tom had called them.

I gathered them up, carried them to a small adjoining bathroom, and flushed them down the toilet. Then I searched the back room thoroughly. I uncovered other larger containers of the white powder as well as pills, capsules, and marijuana. These, too, I flushed down the toilet.

Finally, I was faced with the problem of disposing of Rick Carson. I

wished that he could have fit into the toilet too. In an inspired flash, an idea came to me. There was an old refrigerator in the back room containing a six-pack of beer and a half-filled bottle of wine. I emptied the refrigerator, removed the metal shelves, and twisted the temperature dial to its coldest-setting. Then I wrestled Rick Carson's body into the back room.

After five minutes of heaving, pushing, and struggling, the body was finally wedged into the refrigerator. Even though Rick Carson would keep for a good long while, at least he wouldn't be selling any more drugs.

Feeling almost exhilarated, I sat down to do some careful planning.

ALL THAT HAPPENED ON TUESDAY, AND ALREADY IT'S Friday morning. Since I've taken over management of the antique shop, things have been running pretty smoothly. I've cleaned the place up, replaced the price labels, and arranged the merchandise more systematically than the previous owner had had it. So far, the shop hasn't earned enough money to pay expenses, but, like everything else, it's a gamble. And I've always been a gambler. In the meantime, I can't remember the last time I've felt so alive.

Quite a few addicts have stumbled in, looking for a fix, but I've been able to convince the pathetic creatures that they've made a mistake. I tell them I've never heard of Rick Carson, then lead them outside and point up to the sign over the door.

BEN EMERSON'S ANTIQUE SHOP OLDIES BUT GOODIES

It's a strange-looking sign, what with "BEN EMERSON'S" being faded and blistered and the rest shiny new, but the addicts don't ask many questions. They nod despondently and walk off with haunted looks on their faces. The occasional legitimate customer thinks the "BEN EMERSON'S" is part of the antique motif. I explain to them that I took it from the front of a dry cleaning shop I operated some years back.

And I'm not kidding myself. Later today or tomorrow or next week, a murderous junkie will stagger through the door or one of Rick Carson's "powerful people" will come to check on their investment, and then it'll be all over for me. But, until that time, there will be a breath of new life in the neighborhood.

A moment's renaissance, you might say.

In the private-eye game some cases are tough. Some are a lead-pipe cinch. You win a few and you lose a few. You hope it all evens out in the end, but if it doesn't . . . well, that's the way the cookie crumbles!

Eats

by **RICHARD LAYMON**

I'M A TRAINED INVESTIGATOR, SO I KNEW RIGHT AWAY that the dame who waltzed into my office had class. How did I know? She had blue hair on her head and a poodle tucked under one arm. I took my feet off the desk.

"My name is Mable Wingate," she said.

"Want me to stand up and cheer?" I asked through my mouthful of sandwich.

She tittered. "Isn't he delightful?" She put the question to the pooch, chucking it under the chin. "Do you think he might be good enough to share his sandwich?"

It was salami and Swiss on an onion roll, with lettuce and onions and plenty of mayo. I'd just bought it at Lou's Deli down the block. I'd only taken one bite. I didn't want to part with it. "This is my lunch, lady," I said.

"You don't mind, do you?" she asked.

"Are you planning to hire me?"

"We shall see."

I'm not an idiot. If I didn't fork over some of my sandwich to Snuggles or Snookums or whatever its name was, the old gal would find herself a different gumshoe. (I needed the work. Things had been slow lately, ever since I got on T.V. for plugging one of my clients. What can I say? Mistakes happen.) "You don't watch much television, huh?" I asked.

"Please," she said. "The sandwich."

"Oh, sure." I set it down on my desk. She reached for it. "Ah ah!" I snapped. "Not the whole thing."

"No, of course not. Excuse me."

She waited, hovering over my desk and watching while I scooted back, slid up my trouser leg, and pulled the shiv out of my boot. I pressed its button. The blade flew and snapped into place.

"Dear me," Mable said. She was impressed. Her mouth looked like a little doughnut.

"My toadsticker," I told her.

"I do hope you've washed it."

I've seen what dogs eat. Washed or not, pooch wouldn't care. I pinned the sandwich to my desk top and tried to keep its insides from slopping out as I cut. It made a real mess. "There you go," I said.

Mable snatched up the biteless half. "You're a dear," she told me. She smiled at the dog. "Isn't he a dear, Muffin?"

Muffin licked its chops.

But Mable was the one who ate the sandwich.

SHE WOLFED IT DOWN, THEN EYED THE REMAINS OF MY half. I stuffed the last of it into my mouth before she could make a grab for it.

"That certainly was tasty," she said. "I haven't eaten properly in ages."

I had already noticed that she was skinny, but I hadn't given it much thought. After all, it's chic to look like a cadaver. "Have a seat," I told her.

She sat down. Muffin licked some mayo off her chin. "Someone," she said, "wants to poison me."

"I see."

"It's frightful. I hardly dare touch a bite. I'm withering away to nothing. You must help me."

"I charge three hundred beans a day," I said.

"Three hundred what?"

"Dollars." It was double my usual rate, but I figured she could handle it. She wore diamond earrings, a pearl necklace, and eight rings. I knew that none of the jewelry was fake because of her blue hair and poodle.

"That sounds a trifle steep," she said.

"You get what you pay for," I explained. "I'm the best."

She rolled her eyes toward the ceiling as if she doubted my word.

"You don't want to pinch pennies," I said, "when your life's on the line."

"I suppose you're right."

"Of course I'm right."

She set Muffin on the floor. It skittered under the desk and started chewing on one of my boots. I used my other boot to fend it off while Mable took a checkbook out of her purse. Usually, I insist on cash. A lot of my clients (back when I had clients) were deadbeats. But I figured I could trust Mable.

She made out the check to Duke Scanlon, Private Investigator. Then she filled in the amount. I licked my lips and stopped kicking Muffin. She signed the check and slid it across the desk. It got mayo on it. "Will that be enough," she asked, "to retain your services for a week?"

"Consider me hired. For starters, what makes you think someone wants to poison you?"

"I don't *think* someone wants to poison me. I *know*."

"Has there been a prior attempt on your life?" I asked.

She rolled her eyes again. She was good at it. "My dear young man—may I call you Duke?"

"Duke it is, Mable."

"Duke, now see here, had I been poisoned already I would hardly need your services. I would be pushing up daisies like my dear husband, Oscar."

"What happened to Oscar?" I asked.

"Why, he died, of course. That's what happens when one is poisoned."

"Ah-ha," I said.

"Ah-ha, indeed. It was dreadful. He barely had a chance to swallow. One moment he was complaining that the Hollandaise had curdled, and the next moment he was in it."

"Eggs Benedict?" I asked.

"Precisely."

"When did this happen?"

"April 15th," Mable said. "That's over a month ago, and I haven't

eaten properly since then. Whoever murdered Oscar, you see, intends to do the same to me." Muffin tried to climb my leg. Smiling at Mable, who couldn't see what was going on, I bent over and patted the little cutie on the head and gave its ear a twist. It bit my wrist, then scampered away and hopped onto Mable's lap looking pleased with itself.

"What did the police find?" I asked.

"The police? Ha! I told them and *told them* that Oscar had been poisoned, but would they listen? No. As far as they were concerned, poor Oscar simply dropped dead from a bum heart."

"Did Oscar *have* a bum heart?"

"He most certainly did by the time *they* saw it."

"Was an autopsy performed?"

"Of course," she said.

"No traces of poison were found?"

"No, but I've discussed the matter with my physician and he assures me that there are several types of poison which might go undetected."

"He's right," I told her.

"Of course. He's a doctor."

"Do you have any idea who might have . . ."

"You wouldn't have another one of those delicious sandwiches, would you?" she interrupted.

"Not on me," I said.

"Then let's discuss the rest of the details over lunch. I'm famished."

I was all for it. Not only was I starving, but this called for a celebration. I was \$2,100 richer than I'd been ten minutes ago, and the case would be a cinch. All I had to do was go through the motions.

Because Mable Wingate was in no danger of being poisoned. Her late husband, Oscar, had been dropped by a faulty ticker, not Eggs Benedict. It was good enough for the cops; it was good enough for me.

Shrinks probably have a name for Mable's condition—the way her mind turned things around to help her cope with the sudden shock of Oscar's death. I have a name for it, too—bananas.

Mable was bananas and rich.

I stood to make out like a bandit.

"Not a peep about this to the chauffeur," she warned as we left the building.

"YAMAMOTO'S," MABLE TOLD HIM.

He started driving. "I'm not big on Japanese food," I said.

"None the less, I am."

So Yamamoto's it was. Mable left Muffin in the limousine with

Herbert the chauffeur, and we went in. "I just adore sushi," she said as we sat at a corner table.

"Who's Sushi?" I asked. "The waitress?"

"You have a lot to learn, Duke."

She ordered the same meal for both of us. When the waitress left, she started right in on the case. "One of my relatives," she said, "is obviously the villain. With Oscar out of the way, you see, the entire family fortune fell into my hands. Once I'm out of the way, they'll inherit oodles."

"Who, exactly, will get the oddles?" I asked.

"According to the terms of our will, the wealth would be divided equally among our three children. We also provided handsome amounts for each of our servants."

"So you figure one of the kids poisoned Oscar."

"Or one of their spouses," Mable said. "Or one of the servants. Or a combination."

"In other words, you suspect everyone."

She nodded.

"So they all have a motive. But who had the opportunity? Who was present at the time of Oscar's death?"

"They all were. Wingate Manor is a rather large estate. All of our children live there with their spouses. The servants were also in the house that morning: Herbert the chauffeur, George the butler, Wanda the maid, Kirk the stable boy, and of course Elsie the cook."

I counted on my fingers. "That makes eleven suspects," I said. "Any grandchildren?"

"Not one."

"Well, it makes a big bunch. Maybe we can narrow it down a little."

Before we could start narrowing it down, the food arrived. I stared at it. I wished I was back at Lou's Deli. "What *is* this stuff?" I asked.

"Sushi, my dear."

"It looks like dead fish."

Mable tittered.

I put my nose close to the plate, and sniffed. The last time I'd smelled something like it, I was a kid in a rowboat trying to grab bait out of a minnow bucket. It was a hot day, and most of the minnows were belly up. "I'm not going to eat this," I said.

"Oh, but you must. Until you catch the killer, you'll need to act as my food taster."

"What are you getting at?" I asked.

"Eat," Mable said.

For three hundred dollars a day, I'll eat anything. So I forked a

crittur, held my breath so I couldn't smell it, and put it into my mouth. It tasted the way I was afraid it might taste.

Mable watched me chew. She hadn't touched her food yet. I swallowed, and tried to wash the taste out of my mouth with water.

Mable kept watching.

I got the picture. She was waiting to see if I'd keel over.

"Oscar didn't die in a restaurant," I said.

"No," said Mable. "But one can't be too careful."

"Nobody's going to sneak into the kitchen of a restaurant to poison you," I said.

"One never knows." She pointed her fork at something on my plate that looked like an octopus tentacle.

I ate one, and gagged.

"Now that."

That looked harmless. It looked like a cake of crisp rice—sort of. But it tasted like something that had been left overnight in the cloudy old water from a goldfish bowl.

Mable watched me eagerly. I didn't keel over, but I wanted to.

"Fine," she said. "Now we trade plates."

We traded, and she dug in. It made me feel sick, watching her stuff such junk into her mouth. I flagged down the waitress and ordered a double Scotch on the rocks.

The Scotch helped. I drank, and tried not to look at Mable.

This job, I decided, was not turning out to be such a picnic.

THAT'S HOW IT STARTED. AFTER LEAVING YAMAMOTO'S Sushi Bar and Bait Shop, we took the limo back to Wingate Manor. It was quite a snazzy joint.

Mable introduced me around as the son of an old school chum who was down on his luck and would be living in for the next week. The living in part came as a surprise, but I didn't complain. After all, the place was like a luxury resort complete with pool, sauna, a tennis court, stables, and a television in every bedroom. No wonder the two daughters, the son and their assorted mates weren't eager to move out.

None of them struck me as killers. That came as no big surprise, since I'd already decided Mable's deck was short a few cards.

At cocktail hours, we all sat around the pool. George the butler passed out drinks. I wanted Scotch, but I got a vodka gimlet—the same drink as Mable. After I took a sip, she managed to switch glasses with me. She was quite artful about switching. I don't think anyone caught on.

George passed around a tray of snacks. Canapes, Mable called them.

Since I was the guest, she said, I should be first to help myself. I ate one. It was a miniature sandwich with liver inside. I'm not big on liver, but it sure beat sushi. I didn't keel over. Mable took one.

Later, the rest of the clan headed into the dining room. I could smell a roast. My stomach grumbled. I had one foot in the dining room when Mable grabbed my arm and stopped me.

"Duke and I will be dining later," she told the others. "We have some matters to discuss."

She led me into the study. "I can't let them see that I've hired a taster," she explained.

"No," I muttered. "I guess not."

"They'd know I'm onto their game."

"Right," I said.

Bananas.

I could have used a few bananas, just then. The eating kind.

Finally, the dining room was cleared. Our turn. The roast was cold, but it tasted great. I took a big bite. Mable watched and waited. I poured gravy over my mashed potatoes. I took a big bite. She raised her eyebrows. I sipped the red wine. I ate a yucky chunk of broccoli.

We stared at each other.

"How are you feeling?" she asked.

"Starved."

"You're doing splendid," she said. We traded plates and glasses.

This went on for the next five days. Breakfast, lunch, cocktails and dinner, whether we were taking our meal at the estate or at a restaurant, I tested all the food and drinks first. Then we switched, and Mable ate her fill. Except for one return trip to Yamamoto's, it wasn't half bad.

I spent my days swimming, riding horses, and sometimes playing tennis with members of the clan. A certain son-in-law named Aaron showed a nasty streak on the courts. He liked to slam balls at my face. He was a doctor when he wasn't hanging around the estate. If I had to pick a poisoner, it would have been him.

But I didn't have to pick.

Nobody had any intention of poisoning Mable. She didn't need a private eye or a food taster. She needed a shrink.

I knew that all along.

On Friday afternoon, four hours after our second trip to Yamamoto's, my stomach couldn't hold out for the cocktail hour. I snuck into the kitchen. Elsie the cook wasn't around. The snacks were. I took a loaded tray of canapes out of the refrigerator, set it on the counter, and picked up one of the tiny sandwiches. Muffin, who had grown very fond of my boots during the past few days, was busy

gnawing at my ankle. I peeled open one of the snacks and sniffed it. Liver, Yuck. I tossed it across the kitchen, and Muffin went scampering after it.

The dog gobbled it down.

Adios, Muffin.

MUFFIN MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE BEEN POISONED BY THE canape. Its ticker might've just chosen that moment to go on the fritz.

Sure.

I'm a trained investigator. I don't believe in coincidences.

Mable wasn't bananas, after all.

In a way, that made me feel good. I'd grown fond of the old dame. I was glad to find out she wasn't a loony.

I returned the tray of poisoned snacks to the refrigerator. Then I stashed the mortal remains of Muffin in the pantry and went up to my room to fetch Slugger. Slugger is my .38 caliber snub-nosed revolver. I didn't have a permit to carry a concealed weapon (it got lifted after I dropped that client I mentioned earlier), but I didn't plan to go up against a killer without my equalizer, so I tucked Slugger under my belt. I pulled out my shirt-tail to keep him out of sight, and went outside to the pool.

By five o'clock, the whole gang was there.

"Has anyone seen Muffin?" Mable asked.

Nobody had seen Muffin. That included me.

George came out with a tray of cocktails. We took our glasses. I sipped mine. Mable tried to sneak her usual switch, but I shook my head. "Not necessary," I whispered. She raised her eyebrows, then smiled.

She looked around to make sure nobody was within earshot, then whispered, "Have you unearthed the killer?"

George returned with the tray of poisoned appetizers.

"Put them on the table," I ordered.

"I'm to pass them, sir," he said.

"Do as Duke says," Mable told him.

With a nod, George set the tray on the poolside table. "Now," I said, "go and bring out the other servants. Everyone." He left.

Sally, the wife of Aaron the doctor, saw George depart without passing snacks. "What gives?" she asked.

"This gives," I answered, and pulled out Slugger.

Everyone except Mable started yelling at me. "See here!" I heard. And, "Put that away!" And, "He's berserk!" One of Mable's daughters covered her ears and shouted, "Oh oh oh, he's going to

murder us all!"

"Quiet!" Mable called out. "Duke is a private detective whom I hired to protect me."

That shut them up. Some looked surprised, others confused, a few angry. Aaron looked more angry than anyone. I was glad he didn't have a tennis racquet handy.

"Line up," I commanded.

They formed a line with their backs to the pool.

"What is the meaning of this?" Sally asked.

"You'll soon find out," I said.

When the servants showed up, I made them stand in line with the rest.

"Mable," I said, "the tray."

She went to the table and hefted the tray.

"One canape apiece," I told her.

She walked slowly down the line of eleven suspects, making sure that each of them took one of the little sandwiches.

"Okay," I said. "When I count to three, I want every one of you to eat your snack."

"This is ridiculous," snapped Sally.

"Just a little test," I explained. I didn't bother playing games with the count. I rattled off, "One two three."

They all ate.

Except Aaron.

He threw his canape at me.

"You're the poisoner!" I shouted. I aimed Slugger at his snarling face. "Freeze!"

Aaron froze.

The other ten didn't. They dropped. Some pitched onto the concrete. Some flopped into the pool.

Mable looked at me. "You idiot!" she said.

"Oh, boy," I muttered.

IN THIS GAME, SOME CASES ARE TOUGH. SOME ARE A lead-pipe cinch. You win a few and you lose a few. You hope it all evens out in the end, but if it doesn't . . . well, that's the way the cookie crumbles.

I wouldn't have it any other way. I'm a sleuth, a snoop, a gumshoe. I'm the guy you call when the chips are down and your back's to the wall. I'm Duke Scanlon, Private Eye. ●

Anna decided that planning a murder, like planning a party, was the most tiresome part of the enterprise, that once all the details were worked out, the thing itself was a breeze!

Esprit De Corpse

by DONALD OLSON

HAROLD'S IMAGE, BLOND-HAIRED, SNUB-NOSED, WAS reflected by the car window on that pure and cloudless morning as clearly as in a mirror. The car, a full-size station wagon, had that look of expensive newness which is lost more quickly than that of any other man-made object. Harold turned and looked down toward the lake, blue as his own eyes and as tranquil in its emerald green setting as anyone lucky enough to live upon its shores could desire.

The cottage itself, quite as imposingly spacious as the Cheney's house in town, was hidden by trees from the highway above and boasted a spectacular view of the lake. The surrounding lawns and garden descended in a series of broad terraces to the shoreline rimmed

with aged, picturesque willows. Stone steps led down to a trellis-covered walkway ending at a wooden bench facing the dock, where a sailboat and dinghy were anchored. Thick woods, mostly beech and ash and maple, bordered the western edge of the property.

Harold spied Anna sitting on the bench under the sprawling willow tree, her slight, dark figure as motionless as the boaters riding upon the unruffled water. Harold crossed the lawn adjacent to the garage, transferred the coil of rope he was carrying to his left shoulder, picked up one of the mallets from the croquet set and stealthily descended the stone steps. Creeping up behind Anna, he raised the mallet and brought it down on her dark head with just enough playful force to provoke a sharp cry of surprise. Harold laughed as she sprang up.

"Scare you, did I?"

"Idiot!"

Harold slung down the rope and again swung the mallet, this time like a golf club, whacking a stone out into the water. Then he sat down beside Anna as she resumed her seat with a look of bored irritation at his tomfoolery. She was as dark as he was fair, with perpetually thoughtful, topaz eyes, delicate features which, when animated, achieved more than prettiness.

Harold stroked the mallet with long, brown fingers. "We could use one of these. He'd never know what hit him."

Coolly sceptical, Anna regarded the mallet with distaste. "And then what?"

"Put him in the dinghy, hitch something to his legs and dump him out in the lake. Simple."

"We already nixed that idea. I keep remembering that awful story you told me."

"Well, nobody *killed* him. Guy just drowned." Harold had told her with vivid relish about the time he and some friends had been swimming and this bloated, fishy-blue corpse had drifted in to shore. Drowning had appealed to them at first as the most logical method, everything being so conveniently at hand.

"No," she said, more firmly. "I just don't like it. Drowning's out."

He turned peevish. "You sure you even *want* to do it? Or just talk about it."

"You know we're going to do it."

"Then let's get on with it. There's not much time left. You'll soon be moving back to the city."

"We are *going* to do it. But it has to be done right." She looked down at his feet. "What's the rope for?"

With renewed enthusiasm, he snatched it up and uncoiled it. "The

idea came to me last night. Now listen and don't start shaking your head until I've told you what it is. You pretend you're him. He's sitting here on the bench, right?" Harold looped the rope over his shoulder, slipped off his sandals, and shinnied up the arching trunk of the willow tree until he was perched, half-hidden from view, on the limb directly over Anna's head. He tied one end of the rope to the branch, made a noose with a slip knot in the other.

"Harold . . ." Her tone was already plaintive with disapproval.

"Just wait a minute, will you? He doesn't know I'm up here. He doesn't see me or the rope. You're both sitting there looking out at the lake. You get up and move behind him, see? Okay, here goes. I drop the noose end of the rope like this. You catch it. Quick as a wink you slip it around his neck. I grip this other end of the rope and jump down. Together we yank him right up off the ground."

HE PROCEEDED TO DEMONSTRATE HOW THIS WAS TO BE done. The noose became snagged on a branch. Harold looked down at Anna with a brightly expectant smile, as if waiting for her to applaud. "Get it? We *hang* him. It'll be over in seconds."

"Honestly, Harold, that's about the *dumbest* idea you've had yet."

"It'll work!"

"Oh, sure. What if the limb breaks?" She couldn't help giggling. "I can just see it. The limb snaps off and comes down on *my* head. Oh, brilliant!" She watched him climb down out of the tree. "Besides, we've already decided, it's got to look as if he just went away. Disappeared."

"I give up," he said glumly. "We can't shoot him. No gun. You don't want to drown him. Too risky. You don't want to whack him over the head. Too messy. There's only so many ways you can kill someone . . . I don't see how you can bear to sleep with him."

"Habit," she conceded.

"Look," he said, investing his tone with a superior, male logic. "I give you my word this will work. I know it seems a little—well—"

"Bizarre?"

"I guess so. But I know it'll work."

She remained dubious. "I suppose what I don't like about any of your ideas is that they lack *esprit*."

"Lack what?"

"*Esprit*."

"What's that?"

Anna frowned. "It's hard to explain. It was always one of my mother's pet words. It means a kind of bright cleverness."

"I think this is a pretty clever idea."

"Well, not just cleverness. My mother could explain it. Sibyl has *esprit*. She's part French, you know. So I am, too. She says everything you do should be done with *esprit*."

"Even murder?"

"Why not?" She knew it would be impossible to explain to Harold what she felt. She had felt it ever since they'd begun talking about what they must do. That delicious tingle of wickedness.

He uttered a short, cynical laugh. "Maybe you should ask your mother how we should do it."

"Don't laugh. Mother loathes Prudy. She'd be only too happy if I got rid of him."

"So why doesn't she like him?"

"Because he's *old*. Sibyl hates anything and anyone old. I don't think she even realizes that *she's* old. That's why she likes Tony."

"Do you like Tony?"

"Sure I like him. And he likes me. He's very fond of *me*."

"You like him as much as you like me?"

"Oh, Harold, what a silly question. Tony's a lot older than you. But he's still younger than Sibyl. Tony makes her laugh. My father never made her laugh. He was always such a grouch. An old bear who never talked about anything but money."

"And is your mother going to believe that Prudy just disappeared?"

"Why shouldn't everyone believe it? He'll be gone, won't he? He won't ever come back. They'll have to believe it."

"Prudy!" Harold uttered the name in a tone of acid contempt. Or jealousy. "What a name."

"I can hardly call him Prudhomme in bed, can I?"

"What about Tony? Does he like Prudy?"

Anna looked away. "Tony sort of laughs with his eyes when he sees me with Prudy. Once he said to me, when Sibyl wasn't around. 'Prudy's just not right for you, angel.'"

"He calls you angel?"

"Why not?"

"I don't think I like Tony."

"You never even met him."

"I've seen him," Harold replied, with the cocksure vanity of a natural-born heartbreaker, scornful of the competition.

Presently Anna said: "Why do you keep looking up at the house?"

"I don't know. I keep thinking he's watching us."

"Prudy? You know he's not. He's hard at work in the city. Just like Fatrat always was."

"Fatrat?"

"Sibyl's name for father—when she was mad at him."

"I suppose your father liked Prudy."

"Oh, *mais oui*. He was always complaining I was too rough on Prudy."

"I don't see why you didn't dump that hairy little runt a long time ago."

Anna looked at him with a sly, fetching smile. "Maybe I was waiting for you to show up."

"So now I'm here. What are we going to do about him?"

"Kill him, of course."

"When?"

"Soon. Tomorrow."

"We can't even decide how."

Anna looked again at the rope, then up into the branches. "I suppose it does have a certain *esprit*, in a way."

"Sure it does."

"I'll think about it. I suppose, if we can't come up with a better idea

. . . Of course we still have to decide what to do with him afterwards."

"Bury him."

"Where?"

"Plenty of spots to bury a body around here."

"I thought we could put him in your wagon and take him some place."

Harold vetoed this idea. "That's even more risky than dumping him in the lake. Safest thing is to bury him right here on the property."

Anna squirmed. "I'm not sure I'd like that. Knowing he was still here."

"You'll soon forget about him. All you'll see is a rosebush or something."

"Well, where exactly?"

"Why not in the woods? They're on your property."

Leaving the rope where it lay, Harold picked up the mallet and followed Anna up the steps and across the terraced lawn to a narrow lane snaking along the perimeter of the woods. They picked their way among stumps of felled trees into the very heart of the thicket, to a small, sun-dappled clearing.

"What about here?" said Harold.

"Too open. Down closer to the lake, I think. Nobody will be cutting trees down there."

HAROLD SUGGESTED VARIOUS SECLUDED SPOTS WHERE

piney shrubs, tangled rhododendrons, and mossy rotting tree stumps might provide safe burial sites for a corpse. Anna kept finding fault with each suggestion. Finally, Harold sat down on a stump and said wearily: "I give up. I don't know what sort of place you're looking for."

"I don't either," she admitted, delicately wiping grubby hands on her tight-fitting jeans. "It just doesn't seem right somehow. I keep seeing some nasty little animal digging up the grave. Mauling him."

"We'll put the body in something."

Once more that delicious tingle of wickedness provoked an amused response. "Oh, sure. You can take your wagon to the undertaker's in Stow Ferry and pick up a coffin."

"I meant some sort of box. Or else . . . I know this sounds kind of gruesome, but we could hack him up."

"And bury him in bits and pieces? Harold, how perfectly ghastly."

"Then *where*?"

"Follow me."

Anna led the way back to the path and thence out of the woods to a row of fine old lilacs bordering the other side of the lane.

"What about here? It seems more—fitting. More like a real grave, you know. And it's far enough from the cottage so I won't be walking right over him without even thinking about it."

Harold knelt and prodded the soil with the handle of the croquet mallet. Years of mulching with peat moss had left the ground springy and malleable. "Not a bad idea. Easy digging."

"Good. Then *that's* settled."

"We won't even need a box or anything."

"We'll need *something*. We can't just plant him like a tulip bulb."

"We can use one of those old boat tarps in your garage. Or a plastic trash bag."

The notion of a trash bag as a shroud seemed offensive to Anna, so wanting in *esprit*. But that was a minor detail. "We'll see. Main thing now is how we're going to do it. And when."

Harold studied her face; deep thought always made her look older, wise beyond her years. "I'm not sure how much *esprit* it would have," he said, "but if you were up to it you could smother him with a pillow."

She dismissed this idea with a tart rejoinder. "Do it alone, you mean? That wasn't part of our agreement." She looked up at the sun. "How long can you stay?"

"Long as you want me to."

"Then let's go back down to the lake. Show me again how it would

work. The thing with the rope."

IN THE END, ANNA DECIDED THAT PLANNING A MURDER, like planning a party, was the most tiresome part of the enterprise, that once all the details were worked out the thing itself was a breeze. They had decided upon sunset as the most appropriate time. At the end of a fine summer's day Anna and Prudy were accustomed to sit on the bench beside the lake and watch the sun settle below the horizon. Furthermore, the mechanics of the method required a certain amount of daylight in order to see what they were doing.

At sunset the following day, therefore, Anna walked down the flight of stone steps to the beach with her arm around Prudy's waist. Emerging from under the trellis, she was careful not to glance upward to where Harold was already poised in the willow tree, the rope bunched in his hands. Anna pretended it was like any other afternoon, just the two of them, she and Prudhomme Cheney the Third, sitting side by side on the bench.

When it was over, Harold winked at Anna. "Didn't I tell you? Simple. And no witnesses."

HE WAS WRONG. THE SCENE DID NOT GO UNOBSERVED. Above them in the cottage, standing behind the sun parlor window overlooking the lake, Sibyl Cheney witnessed the entire grotesque episode.

"Tony!" she cried sharply. "Come out here."

Her auburn-haired, aggressively handsome young lover came out of the livingroom carrying a cocktail shaker and two glasses. "What's up, sugar?"

"Look for yourself. You'll never *believe* this."

He deposited the glasses and shaker on a white wicker table and stood beside her, one arm encircling her waist. "Good lord, what are they doing?"

"Can't you see? How perfectly morbid! They've hanged Prudy from the willow tree."

Tony laughed. "Games children play, eh?"

"Grim sort of game, to say the least. Little monsters."

"Well, you're the one always telling her to get rid of that motheaten teddy bear."

"She's too old for it. I can't imagine why she's clung to it all this time. Unless it's because her father gave it to her. She even named it after him. I sometimes think she pretends he *is* her father, just to annoy me. Pretending he's at work in the city, and insisting he sit at the table

with her while we're eating."

"Who's the little boy?"

"Kid from next door. Howard or Harold something or other. New people. I've never met his parents. I think he must be a bit older than Anna."

"No kid is *older* than Anna," he quipped. "Precocious little minx. But adorable."

"Far too precocious. But yes, adorable. And not totally without a certain *esprit*."

"What are they doing now?"

They watched as Harold and Anna slipped the noose from the teddy bear's neck and, heads bowed, stood looking down at it. Then Harold turned and raced back up the steps out of sight. Anna sat down on the bench, chin resting on her folded hands. At length, Harold reappeared pulling a battered red wagon holding a spade and plastic bag. As Tony and Sibyl watched, Harold picked up the teddy bear and dropped it into the wagon. Anna lagging behind, he pulled the wagon along the shore and into the lane bordering the woods, up the lane as far as the clump of lilacs. With the little space he knelt and began digging, while Anna slipped the teddy bear into the plastic bag.

"Good heavens," murmured Sibyl, "now they're going to bury the thing."

"Very decent of them."

She shot a reproachful glance. "*I* think it's morbid."

"Kids are never morbid. Bloodthirsty, maybe, but never morbid."

"You know what I mean. One can't help wondering where they get their ideas."

His eyes, untroubled but not quite so amused, met hers. "Oh, come on. You know better than that."

"I can't help it," she said tightly. "It still bothers me. She *is* precocious. And I'll never forget that night when we found her there on the stairs, saying she couldn't sleep. Who knows if she heard what we were talking about?"

"She didn't. She would have said something."

"Anna? Don't be so sure. She's a funny kid. I never know what's going on in her mind. I don't know to this day if she loved her father—or utterly despised him."

He grinned. "The way you did?"

"I didn't deeply despise Prudy. It's just that I loved you. Much too desperately."

His arm tightened around her waist. "And I love the way you've shown it. Thanks again for the station wagon. It's a beauty."

"I wish I could have shown my appreciation—for all your help—sooner. But you know we've had to be careful. Look. They've buried it. And now Anna's picking some roses."

They watched in silence as Anna knelt and reverently placed the flowers on the tiny grave. Tony smirked. "Cute."

She glanced at him sharply. "You wouldn't think it so cute if they'd dragged that wagon into the woods."

He shrugged. "Even if they'd picked the same spot it would have been nothing more than coincidence."

"I know. But it would have been awfully damned spooky. Darling, what if she *knows*? What if some day—"

"Oh, stop it, Sibyl. You're letting your imagination run away with you." Sibyl turned and poured the cocktails, handed one to Tony. They continued watching the children, who were now standing erect, hands folded prayerfully on their breasts. Anna seemed to be intoning some sort of litany.

"I can't help it," Sybil repeated. "You didn't see the way she looked at me last summer, when she asked me where her father was and I said, 'I really don't know. He seems to have quite disappeared.' I'll never forget the look on her face. So sly. So enigmatic. As if she could read my mind. As if she *knew*."

His voice roughened with impatience. "I think it's this place. You should have taken my advice and sold it."

"We can't sell it. Ever. Suppose someone cleared the woods over there and decided to build a house on that lot. Started digging."

AT DINNER THAT EVENING ANNA SEEMED UNNATURALLY subdued. Tony tried to tease a smile out of her without success. Finally Sibyl, with a certain testiness, asked her what was wrong, why she was only nibbling at her food.

Anna regarded her mother with a troubled frown. "It's Prudy."

Sibyl exchanged a quick, blank look with Tony. "Prudy? What about Prudy?"

"Have you seen him?"

"No, darling, I don't believe I have. Why?"

Anna laid down her fork and uttered a profoundly melancholy sigh. She looked at Tony, and then at Sibyl, her expression devoid of *esprit*, but her tone, when she spoke, most decidedly precocious:

"I really don't know. He seems to have quite disappeared." ●

It was cold-blooded murder, and yet the killer was so sure of himself he invited the Chief of Police to watch him commit the act!

Invitation To A Funeral

by **ARTHUR CUFF**

I HAD COME TO COLLECT THE BODY AND I WAS SURPRISED to find Colonel Lehsahee, Chief of the National Police, there ahead of me. The Colonel is the most charming, unscrupulous and lazy man in the Principality and rarely leaves his plush office. "I was a witness to the murder," he said to me, chagrin in his voice, nodding his head of thick silver hair. "The murderer was bold enough to invite me to watch. But I cannot prove he has committed a crime."

We stood there in a dusty adobe village in the Persian Gulf Principality of Rasht where I was assigned by Carie Oil Company—COCO for short—and the Colonel began his grim story. "I arrived yesterday," he said, "after a kidney-breaking ride on that camel trail the Prince calls a 'highway.' The summons had been—come to the house of the Khan, *Agha* Feridoun, for the funeral of his American wife."

"But I thought she was murdered just this morning!"

"Yes, indeed! Haven't I always said that murder requires careful attention to detail? The Khan learned that lesson well."

The Wife

"I BELIEVE YOU LAST SAW THE KHAN'S LADY, THE former Miss Cheryl Parsons of Kissimee, Florida, in your month of December, hey, Jamie?" the Colonel said to me. "That was the last time her husband allowed her to come into the capital city."

"That's true, it was around Christmas. She'd been here two years already—"

"With a lifetime of sand to look forward to," the Colonel cut in. "The romance of marrying a 'shiek' evaporates quickly in our desert."

"Yeah, she talked of nothing but her promised trip home to see her folks at Christmas."

"Her husband had granted her that one concession in a hard life." The Colonel drew on his black cigaret, a new look of calculation coming into his somber face. "She really was a lost waif in our hard country, wasn't she? So young and blonde, and totally unprepared to live the life of a desert khan's wife. Is it the custom of an American oil company executive to be a post office for U.S. citizens abroad, Jamie?"

"No, but I made an exception for Cheryl. Her suspicious husband refused to allow her to receive letters. So I let Cheryl's parents send her mail to my company address. How did you know about that?"

"Subverting a husband's authority is a criminal offense, dear Jamie," said the Colonel, flashing a grim little smile through his cigaret smoke. "I'll let it pass this time if you answer me one question. Did you also keep her American passport in your office safe?"

I was astonished. "How could you know about that? I told no one. Nor did she, I'm sure."

RASHT, AS MANY OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD, SAYS that a woman who marries a local man takes his nationality and can have no other. U.S. law does not work that way, so Cheryl was still a Yankee, too. But her husband confiscated her U.S. passport when they married and tore it to bits. Cheryl needed a new U.S. passport for her Christmas trip and came to me. In some parts of the Rashti desert, Carie Oil and I are the closest things to Uncle Sam.

Since many of the American wives of COCO's Rashti employees have the same problem Cheryl had, the company gave me an instant camera to take passport photos in my private office. I asked Cheryl to step before the lens and to throw back the black veil her husband demanded she wear. There, on a little gold chain around her throat, was a tiny crucifix. It was the only time I had ever known her to wear something like that. It must have given her a sense of rebellion to wear it even if just for a passport photo her husband would never see. The only passport he would ever know about was the Rashti one she would use to exit the Principality.

I snapped the photo and typed her application, had her sign it over my notarial seal, and sent it to the U.S. Consulate across town. When

the new passport was returned, I filed it with the others in my office safe. At the last minute, Cheryl's husband cancelled her trip home. I suspect he thought she would not return to Rasht, and he was probably right.

The Colonel tapped the attache case under my arm and said, "I presume you have in there Cheryl's U.S. passport to prove the identity of the corpse? Good! Let me see it." The Colonel held the passport as though it were a precious thing, carefully studying each page. "Why, this passport is brand new!" he said, startled. When he came to the photo page, he added, "I see you took her picture Western-style, without the veil," and his somber expression slowly changed to one of triumph. He returned to me the passport and said, "Thank you, Jamie, you have just proved the Khan a murderer!"

The Plan

THREE WEEKS BEFORE, THE COLONEL TOLD ME, HE HAD stood in the doorway of his office, his police clerks at their battered desks behind him scratching away with pens clogged with sand. Before him lay the dusty main street of the Prince's capital. Colonel Lehsahee held his ever-present black cigaret in his hand as he idly watched the Khan Feridoun weave through the street jammed with coppermongers, shouting children and the bronze-faced tribesmen who had come to town to sell the rich black and red carpets woven by their wives. The Khan disappeared into the *madresseh*, the college of priests, a strange place to find a man of the Khan's irreligious type. Lehsahee catalogued that interesting information in his mental file.

The scribe of the *madresseh* likewise found it peculiar to suddenly confront the Khan there in the cool shadows below the gleaming, cracked, blue-tiled walls. But he said in the requisite formality, "Your orders are on my eyes, Sir Khan! How may I serve you?"

Agha Feridoun was as different from his desert people as Snow White was from the Seven Dwarfs. He was tall, broad-shouldered, with sharp features and flashing brown eyes, and he dressed in the best European fashion, his tailored trousers tucked into his felt boots. "Salaam aleikoom, Agha," said the Khan. "You are the scribe of the laws, are you not? I have a technical question."

The scribe gestured toward a platform cut into the blue wall where lay his dusty carpet and pillows and a Koran on its little stand. "Please join me in my study," he said.

"The subject," said the Khan when they were settled, "is infidelity and what to do about it."

"That depends on the details, sir. Who is the faithless one, man or woman? The law prescribes different penalties by sex."

"Wife," said the Khan, his dark face hardening.

"And her station in life? Again the law sets differing penalties for slave and mistress. One must respect the details."

"The wife of a khan."

The scribe faltered in ticking off the requirements. "Again, Sir Khan, the law demands to know her nationality as penalties differ by state."

"She was not born Rashti but she is one of us by marriage."

The scribe felt sweat start from his body. Everyone knew this tough tribesman had brought to Rasht an American bride. It was his own wife he meant to kill! "One last question, sir, as the law requires it. What is her religion?"

"Moslem by marriage."

"That simplifies things."

"Tell me of the simplicity. What does the law allow a man who has been betrayed by his wife?"

"Death, of course. The man may kill his wife provided he abides by the law." The scribe licked his lips and thought carefully before he continued. There could be no mistakes; the law was unforgiving. Worse yet, in this city of Rasht was one even more unforgiving entity who loved the detail of crime, the policeman Lehsahee. "The law provides a simple formula, sir. The husband must catch the wife and lover in the act. They must be entirely on their carpet of love. Many illicit lovers conjoin with a foot or a hand on the floor. If the husband finds them thus, he may not kill them as they are not legally adulterous."

"That's incredible!"

"It's the law in every Moslem nation, Rasht no exception."

"What more?"

"The law demands the husband bring witnesses to certify the act."

The Khan groaned.

"No, no," the scribe added hastily, "the law doesn't seek to humiliate. It merely demands insurance that homicide is not done. There are so many witnesses if the wife to be killed is a Jew, a Christian, an idolator, a Baha'i. For a Moslem wife, you only need four, the least."

"Four!" cried the Khan. "I must show my humiliation to *four*?"

"Four men, to be precise. In this case, the husband should be relieved that his wife is not a Jew. For a Jew, the law demands six witnesses viewing two different acts. For a Christian, since they are closer to Islam, the law requires six witnesses but only one viewing."

The Khan climbed trembling to his feet, his face ablaze with fury. He flung down a fistful of coins and was gone into the cool shadows of the *madresseh*.

The Act

IT WAS A BRILLIANT EVENING WHEN THE COLONEL arrived at the Khan's invitation in the village owned by the Khan and filled with his serfs. The silver-haired Colonel received all the honors due the Chief of the National Police—Persian carpets were strewn on the desert sand from his car to the great wooden door of the Khan's adobe fortress, green flags flew from the white-washed mosque and the peasant women in bright, petticoated skirts brought their children and their goats to peer at him. Lehsahee lit his cigaret with his usual flourish and went into the cool fortress, slapping dust from his suit.

There he found Feridoun and his three sub-khans. The funeral party was already well-begun. Servants unrolled more carpets and laid cushions for the Colonel. They brought a fresh samovar of tea, and presented him with bread, cheese and mint. The party's conversation ran the usual gamut—money, women, land, money, the Prince and money. They interrupted their party for prayers and later for feasting, and it was early still, about two a.m., when Feridoun led in his American wife.

Lehsahee had seen Cheryl many times before but he found her even more dazzling in her blonde beauty there in that adobe night with these sun-worn tribesmen and her dark prince of a husband. The Khan turned to Cheryl to say, "Has my cousin Abood returned from Paris?" and she replied softly, "Yes."

The Khan dismissed his wife and the three sharp-eyed sub-khans stared after her. One by one the khans left the room until only the Colonel and Feridoun remained. "Now, my Colonel, I will show you the reason for my peculiar invitation. Follow me."

The Khan took from the wall his double-barrelled shotgun and led up narrow, crumbling stairs to the adobe roof. The first pale light of false dawn showed the three other guests huddled together over a dome on the roof, peering through the chimney vent into the apartment beneath. The Colonel and the Khan likewise looked down into Cheryl's bedroom. She and the cousin Abood lay together on a huge red and black carpet, making love.

The three khans turned to Feridoun, curiosity in their hard eyes, and one said, "What are you going to do about this?"

"Only what is permitted by law," Feridoun replied.

The Colonel groaned, at last realizing what was meant by his invitation to a funeral.

"I have gathered you four here as my witnesses," the Khan continued, "as the law requires four witnesses to a Moslem wife's adultery. I have invited Colonel Lehsahee to confirm all this and to make him a witness to its legality. Colonel, what have you to say?"

"It's permitted and it's legal, that's true, *Agha Khan*, but the law was not meant to be used in cold blood. Divorce your woman and end it that way. Don't stain your soul with blood."

"My Colonel, you've too long associated with the foreigners in the capital. No man of pride can divorce a faithless wife. He must kill her, and the law permits it."

Feridoun shoved the barrels of his shotgun into the chimney vent and sighted on the lovers.

"Don't be insane!" cried the colonel, grabbing for the gun just as the two barrels discharged.

A grim little smile of triumph came to Feridoun's face as he said, "It's the law and it's fair, and you are witness, Colonel."

The Colonel sagged to his knees on the dusty roof, suddenly spent. "It may be the letter of the law," he said weakly, "but it is not the spirit of the law." He looked up at Feridoun cracking open his gun to throw out the spent cartridges. "You have offended the spirit of the law, *Agha*. Worse, you have offended *me*."

"What can you do about it?" The Khan laughed a rueful laugh that startled his fellow khans. "I am without a wife. Let's finish the legal details and call that meddling American oil company to send her corpse to her family. Then we can begin the selection of my new bride—a tribesgirl this time, one not so easily bored with desert life."

The "details" were unpleasant even for a policeman of Lehsahee's experience. But Feridoun had planned well and all was in order—not so much as a fingertip of the two lovers touched the bare floor because Feridoun had given his wife for her bed the largest Persian carpet the Colonel had ever seen.

It was the size of that monster carpet that made the Colonel cold with rage and determination to see Feridoun staked before the Prince's firing squad for murder.

The Trial

I STOOD THERE IN THE DUSTY STREET OF THE VILLAGE owned by the Khan, sick with the evil of the story the Colonel had told me. And once again, as on too many occasions during my tenure in the

Principality, I followed Colonel Lehsahee into the presence of a criminal thoroughly confused how I had helped him trap the murderer. We went into the Khan's fortress, thick with dust and gloom. There we found his sub-khans and shook hands and bowed three times to each in desert custom before our host walked in.

"Feridoun Khan!" cried the Colonel brightly enough to give me a start. "What delight to find you here with my fellow witnesses for this informal inquest."

"Inquest?" asked Feridoun in surprise, the confident smile wavering on his face and his hand falling limply to his side after shaking mine.

"Merely a requirement of the law, *Agha*."

The three surprised sub-khans set down their little glasses of tea and pushed them away, not wanting to accept hospitality of a man under an indictment.

"This room will do nicely for our legal session," the Colonel continued cheerfully, ignoring Feridoun's confusion and sitting cross-legged on the carpet with the sub-khans. He motioned Feridoun and me to sit. He pulled from under his left arm one of the two pistols he kept there and rapped the barrel on the samovar in the middle of the carpet. It was as effective as a judge's gavel in that dreary fortress.

But the Colonel's voice was mild and friendly as he said, "First, a brief statement of fact as determined by my careful police investigation. Cheryl Parsons, wife of Feridoun Khan of this village, lies dead, and likewise the Khan's male cousin, Abood, both shot to pieces. The corpses of the victims were found together on a single carpet and therefore we can assume they were committing the crime of adultery. The cause of death—shotgun—that same weapon there on your wall, *Agha*. Who perpetrated the deed?"

"I did, as you know, Colonel, as you saw," replied the Khan, suspicion in his voice.

"For what reason?"

"My wife betrayed me with my cousin—that's in your 'police investigation,' " the Khan said scornfully.

"On what authority did you commit the act?"

"By the law of the land in a crime of passion."

At that phrase I was surprised to see cold rage gleam from the Colonel's eyes, and even more surprised to hear him continue his amiable questioning with, "That is the question before this inquest. Who are our witnesses? The law requires a certain number, you know."

"These are my witnesses, as well as yourself," said Feridoun in exasperation.

"But where are the other two?"

The Khan's face froze. "What other two? There were only four, that is all the law demands."

"I believe you are mistaken, *Agha*, the law requires six."

"Four! Only four! I confirmed it weeks ago with the best legal scholar in the capital."

"Four, *Agha*, yes—four to kill a Moslem wife. Six for a Christian!"

"Damn you, Colonel, what a fright you gave me!" The Khan laughed in nervous relief. "She was a Moslem."

"Prove it."

The Khan drew from an ornate chest an illuminated parchment and handed it to the Colonel. "Our wedding contract on which you may plainly see she converted to Islam and we were wed as Moslems."

"This document is two years old, *Agha*."

"We were married two years ago. That's plain enough even for a policeman to see," said the Khan with confident scorn.

The Colonel turned slowly to me and said, even more casually, "This is our good friend and the resident executive in Rasht of Carie Oil who has come at the Khan's request to claim Cheryl's body. You have a fascinating document in your possession, Jamie, please show it to us."

Still puzzled what bearing it could have on the murder, I held up Cheryl's passport.

"Show us the photo, if you please." I opened to the photo page. My eyes were rivetted on Cheryl's throat—the veil had been pulled back to reveal her face to my camera, and there sparkled a tiny gold crucifix. One of the three sub-khans peering over my shoulder whispered, "Why, she's a Christian!"

Feridoun snatched the passport from my hand, glanced at the photo and flung down the passport in the Colonel's lap. "Her passport has no validity in Rasht! It can mean nothing legally against my marriage contract!" she shouted.

"It means everything *if* it bears a later date than the contract," the Colonel replied, his voice gone cold. "What is the date by Cheryl's signature, Jamie?"

I did not have to read the passport the Colonel handed to me. "Just last Christmas," I said.

The only sound in the gloomy fortress was the cocking of the pistol in the Colonel's hand as he pointed it at the Khan's chest, and the words, echoing in the coldness, "You are under arrest, *Agha*, for murder!" ●

The unit was a potential killer—and so was its owner!

The Big, Cool Sleep

by **BOB WARNER**

CRAIG WINTON GOT THE IDEA AFTER THE SERVICE MAN came to check the air-conditioning unit.

"It's a good thing you shut down the unit and called us before you tried to use it again," said the service man, pointing toward the open panel on the side of the unit. "This is an older model, and you have a defective safety cut-off and a lot of bad wiring. You've got a short that caused the wires to start burning. That's what you smelled. If you had left the unit on any longer, you'd have probably burned the house down."

"Can you repair it?" asked Craig.

"Oh, sure. But I don't have the part I need with me, and it's going to take some extensive rewiring. I can get started on it first thing in the morning, if that's okay."

"I'm sure we can manage for one night," said Craig.

"Just don't use the unit until I get it repaired. I've shut it off at the main breaker box. With that defective safety cut-off, and the wiring the way it is—well, you could be about ninety-nine percent certain you'd have a dangerous—and I mean dangerous—electrical fire if you tried to use the unit the way it is. I've seen it happen enough times to know what I'm talking about. For your own safety, Mr. Winton—leave the unit shut off. You've got a potential killer on your hands if you try to use that unit before it's repaired properly."

"Don't worry," said Craig. "I'll make sure the unit stays off until you come back tomorrow."

After the service man left, Craig went to the kitchen for a beer. As he reached into the refrigerator for the beer, something clicked in his

mind, and the idea was there, clear as crystal. It was so very, very simple, and so very, very foolproof. If it worked, that is. The perfect way to get rid of Joni. Craig had been wondering for weeks how he could do it and get away with it. Now, all of a sudden, there was the answer.

Craig sat at the kitchen table, sipping his beer and enthusiastically working the scheme over in his mind, testing it. The more he thought about it, the better he liked it. There was a ninety-nine percent chance it would work. Even if it didn't work, he would be no worse off than he was now. He had nothing to lose if it didn't work; everything to gain if it did.

Craig was sitting at the kitchen table, just finishing up his third beer, when Joni came home.

CRAIG AND JONI WINTON HAD BEEN MARRIED SIX YEARS. The first five had been relatively good ones. Then, five months ago, Joni had inherited nearly one hundred and fifty thousand dollars from her uncle; two months later, Craig met Cybil Quarles.

Having the extra money changed Craig and Joni. With what they had managed to save in six years, and with what was left of the inheritance money, after taxes, Craig had decided to quit his job and do something he had been wanting to do for a long time: try his hand at becoming a full time professional writer. But after months of abortive writing, he still hadn't sold a single word; and Joni had begun to nag at him for wasting his time—and their money—and insisting he go back to work. He stubbornly refused to give up his writing. In retaliation, Joni had begun a non-stop buying spree that showed no signs of waning.

Their bank balance, however, was waning. There was only fifty-two thousand dollars left in their joint account.

Craig's writing had brought him to Cybil Quarles. Three months ago he had decided to try to sell to one of the local magazines, submitting an article on the best tourist spots around the city. He had received a call from one of the reading editors, a Miss Cybil Quarles, who wanted to talk to him about the article. He went right over to the editorial office of the magazine—a small, cluttered, noisy place on 48th Street. After one look at Cybil Quarles, Craig ceased to care about anything or anyone except Cybil Quarles. He was barely aware of her kindly criticisms as she told him the article was being rejected, but that she thought he did show promise as a writer. The words didn't matter; he listened only to the soft, purring sound of her voice.

Cybil Quarles was one of those raven-haired, peaches-and-cream-skin beauties who seem unaware of their beauty and speak in a soft,

demure, almost apologetic tone of voice. Craig sized her up as a lovely and desirable young woman who acted as though she were looking for someone to lean on, someone to take care of her. And that's exactly the way she turned out to be.

Cybil (Craig learned that same evening after she invited him to her apartment to talk more about his writing) was from a small town in Georgia. She had taken a bus to the city, worked her way through Ashdon University, and had received a degree in journalism two years ago. After graduation, Cybil had decided to stay in the city, applying for work at several newspapers and magazines before being hired as a reading editor. At first, she had been very ambitious, determined to make a name for herself, a glamorous career in the publishing business. Then she found she wasn't very happy with the job. In fact, she wasn't happy with the idea of working, period. She had found that her folks had been right when they told her, "This career stuff you want won't work, honey. What you need to do is find yourself a good man, settle down, let him take care of you, and raise a houseful of children." Cybil had been looking for "a good man" for the past year and a half, but had found none who suited her.

Craig discovered, that first evening, that *he* suited her. Lying in her bed, happy and perspiring from an hour of love-making, Craig held Cybil in his arms and stroked her long, raven hair and soft, pale-cream shoulders and reaffirmed to himself what he had known from the first moment he saw her: Cybil very definitely suited him, too.

AT FIRST, CRAIG FELT A TWINGE OF GUILT OVER THE growing affair with Cybil. Except for a couple of meaningless one-night stands, he had never been unfaithful to Joni. But that had been before Joni inherited the money, and they had begun to drift apart. Cybil loved him, depended on him, encouraged his writing. She was always there for him with a soft, soothing word and tender embrace. He certainly couldn't say any of those things about Joni anymore. Joni had become a nagger, a pursuer of expensive purchases, someone who slept in the same bed with him—but who hadn't *slept with* him for weeks. As far as depending on him—Joni now controlled the bulk of the money and no longer depended on Craig for anything. For all he knew (and he really didn't give a damn anymore), Joni might even have her own male counterpart of his Cybil.

What Craig did know, more and more with each passing day, was that he wanted free of Joni. Craig wanted to be with Cybil, as much as Cybil wanted to be with him.

There were problems. One of them was Cybil herself. Cybil was very

insecure. Cybil wanted Craig—but she also wanted assurance that he would be able to provide her with the things she wanted and needed: a lot of love, a lot of him being with her, a good home, and—plenty of money in the bank. Cybil wanted Craig and a secure future, both emotionally and financially. She wanted Craig all to herself, so she could quit her job and be with him while he continued to write full time. It didn't take much reflection on Craig's part for him to realize he wanted the same things. The only drawback was, both he and Cybil knew that it might take some time for his writing to "catch on" and start earning him the kind of financial security they both so badly wanted.

ANOTHER PROBLEM WAS JONI. CRAIG HAD A VERY GOOD idea what her reaction would be if he asked her outright for a divorce. She would probably agree to it—on her terms. He had brought it up once, in a joking, hypothetical way, just to see what her reaction would be. If they did split up, Joni let Craig know in no uncertain terms, he would get exactly what he had contributed to their income during the time he had been "writing for a living"; which was to say, exactly nothing.

So: Craig wanted Cybil, wanted desperately to be free of Joni, wanted to continue his writing free of the constraints of any other employment. And he wanted the fifty-two thousand dollars remaining in the joint account. There was one way he could have all that, and more. Should something fatal happen to Joni, Craig would get Cybil, his continued writing career, the savings—and the life insurance. Shortly after they were married, he had taken out policies on himself and Joni for two hundred thousand dollars each, and those policies were still very much in force.

Craig had thought it all over countless times. Joni would give him a divorce, but that was all. Joni was thirty-one years old, and in perfect health; it wasn't likely she would drop dead of some sudden, exotic disease. Neither was she accident prone, which meant there was little likelihood she would trip, fall and break her neck any time soon. That left only one way out for Craig: he would have to get rid of Joni himself.

But how? The more obvious methods were out. It had to be done right, had to look like an accident—one that no one could possibly connect him with. Otherwise, what good would it do him to get rid of Joni—only to die in the gas chamber or spend the rest of his life behind bars? What he had to come up with was the perfect, the foolproof method of murder. Or, as he preferred to think of it, of *release*.

And now he had the method, if it worked.

A faulty air-conditioner was, hopefully, going to do his dirty work for him.

JONI STALKED INTO THE KITCHEN, OBVIOUSLY UPSET and very angry about something, and slammed her purse—a new and expensive one—down on the table. She wore a new pants suit, new shoes, and a new necklace. There was probably a load of other new stuff outside in her new Buick, waiting for him to bring it in.

“Well, Hemingway, did you finish your Great American Novel today? Or did you hit a writer’s block that you’re trying to remove by drinking all the beer in the refrigerator? Your writing ability’s not getting any better—but your capacity to consume booze damned sure is!”

For a change, her sarcasm didn’t bother him at all. He was feeling very tolerant, now that there was solid hope that his future would soon be much, much brighter. Now that Joni would soon be out of the picture. He even took time to look at the clothes she was wearing without fuming inwardly over their cost. He had to admit, she had good tastes in clothing. The pants suit would be just the thing to be caught dead in!

Craig had worked it all out while drinking the three beers. It was really very simple, if it worked. He would just have to help it along a little. And he had been working on that.

Between his first and second beers, he had gone to the bathroom and taken five of Joni’s sleeping pills from the medicine cabinet. The highly-potent, prescription sleeping pills Joni had gotten in May when the tension between them had begun to mount. She had turned to sleeping pills, and he had begun to drink beer by the case in a mutual effort to make their crumbling marriage at least marginally endurable. Their only half-way agreeable moments together anymore came around two in the afternoons, when they sat down together at the kitchen table, he with his beer and she sipping a cup of coffee. They somehow managed a quiet truce for half an hour or so. Then Joni would take one of her sleeping pills and lie down for several hours.

Between his second and third beers, Craig had made a pot of coffee for Joni, dropping the pills into the hot liquid. He had also turned on the air-conditioner a few minutes before two, when Joni usually got home from her endless shopping trips. He set the thermostat to its lowest setting, so it would continue to run for hours—or until the bad switch and faulty wires caused a fire. The pills would insure that Joni slept very soundly—dead to the world, you might say—while the air-

conditioner hopefully did its work. Such a tragedy it would be. ("Oh, God, I warned her before I left about the air-conditioner. But she always did like a cool house, so she must have turned it on anyway. She took one of those damned sleeping pills before I left. She was probably so groggy she forgot about the danger. If only I had been here!") He would make it a point, just as soon as Joni was asleep, to go to the library, make such a nuisance of himself by bugging the librarian with research questions that he would be sure to be remembered, and stay there until the place closed. If the house did burn—and Joni along with it—he would have the perfect alibi to the perfect murder.

And if the damned air-conditioner didn't short out and cause a fire, at least he would have the satisfaction of seeing Joni suffer through the world's worse hangover the next day!

JONI WENT TO THE REFRIGERATOR, TOOK OUT A CAN OF beer and carried it over to the kitchen cabinets. With her back to him, she reached up and took a glass from the cabinet.

"You taking up drinking, too?" asked Craig.

"Hardly. This—family—can't afford two alcoholics! I just saw that you'd made coffee for me, so I thought I'd return the favor—if you can call it that—by getting you a beer. By the way, there are only twelve or thirteen cans left—not nearly enough to get you through the rest of the day. Unless, that is, this is going to be another of your evenings to do more of your precious 'research'."

Up yours, too, thought Craig as he took the glass from Joni and took a sip of beer.

Joni sat down and put her elbows on the table. She glared across the table at Craig.

"Something *special* bothering you today?" asked Craig. He took another sip of beer, licked foam from his lips.

"Yes, there is, Craig. I've had it up to here with you—and this travesty of a marriage we have. And—with that Southern Belle tart of yours. Oh, don't bother denying it. Did you really think I wouldn't catch on to something like that? I've suspected for some time now. You and your 'research' trips to the library four or five nights a week. Why didn't you just move in with her, Craig."

"You're imagining things," said Craig.

"That's what I told myself, at first," said Joni. She opened her purse and took out a package of cigarettes. "I kept watching us drift apart, and I kept telling myself it couldn't be because of another woman, when all the time I really knew that's exactly what it was. It hurt my pride, and I hated you because you didn't even have the decency to tell

me, to ask out. Finally, it didn't really matter anymore, but I had to see for myself. I followed you last week, to her place. Today, I went there and talked with her myself. She's quite a little lady, Craig. Full of sugar and spice and all sorts of other sweet—slime. In case you haven't noticed, that bitch is hard as nails underneath that creamy exterior, and as money-hungry as they come. Almost as bad as you, Craig.

"She threw quite a temper tantrum. Probably a side of her you haven't seen—yet. She said a few things that made me do a lot of thinking. In that awesomely sweet-acid way of hers, she told me she wished I were dead, you wished I were dead—and why didn't I just go away and leave the two of you alone before something *does* happen to me! And then the sweet little bitch said one thing too many. 'Craig only stays with you because of the money!' I'm frightened, Craig; frightened of both of you. So, I'm going to take Cybil's—advice—and leave."

CRAIG FELT HIMSELF GROWING MORE AND MORE APPREHENSIVE as Joni continued her tirade. He hadn't expected anything like this. He could see his whole beautiful scheme, swirling right down the drain. Sure Joni would leave; leave and go straight to a private investigator, who wouldn't have any trouble gathering enough damning evidence for her to take Craig to divorce court—and take everything away from him. If she had just put this off one more day. A few more lousy hours—and it would probably have been all over with!

Craig forced himself to stay calm. Maybe there was still time, still a way to pull it off.

"You're leaving right away, then?" he asked.

"Yes, in a few minutes. I just stopped by to—to get a few things and let you know I'm going. Don't ask me why, but I had this crazy urge to see you once more before I left for good."

"Look, Joni, all this isn't what it seems. Cybil, well, she was just someone I met after you and I started having our problems. I've—I've been trying to break it off. She's started taking it too seriously. I realize it's you I—"

"You're a dreadful liar, Craig."

"No, really, Joni. Forget Cybil. Why don't you pour yourself a cup of coffee, and let's talk it over. We can work it out."

Joni pushed back her chair and stood. "No, Craig," she said, not looking at him. "It's too late for any more talk. I'll just get my things and leave. I also saw a lawyer today. He'll be contacting you soon to—to work out the details."

Craig felt panic, the sudden, empty anger of defeat. He had been so close to maybe getting rid of Joni for good, and now she was thumbing

her nose at him! He couldn't let her go. No, by God, he wouldn't just let her walk out. She was going to drink the damned coffee and then lay down on their bed until she went to sleep.

She *was* going to do that—one way or another.

Craig pushed back his chair and started to get up. Suddenly a wave of dizziness hit him, and he fell back onto the chair. The room began to spin crazily.

"I thought you might try something violent when I told you," said Joni. "I put something in your beer. Oh, don't worry, it won't hurt you. You'll pass out and sleep for awhile. When you wake up, I'll be gone."

Craig's eyelids were so heavy he couldn't keep them open. He was becoming so tired, so tired and so sleepy. His mind was a jumble of fuzzy, confused thought. There was something he must remember; something he must tell Joni. Something very important.

The air-conditioner. He had to tell Joni to turn off the air-conditioner before she left.

Craig's left cheek lay on the cool surface of the table. So nice. So restful. He was *so* sleepy. But—*no*! He *had* to tell her. Before she left. Before it was too late. Before she left him there asleep with the air-conditioner running. He worked his lips, trying to say the words. Finally, just before he dropped into the quiet, peaceful darkness, he managed to mumble: "Ahh-ahre condis . . . nurh . . ."

JONI LOOKED AT THE SLEEPING CRAIG FOR A LONG moment. She felt a momentary pang of regret. Maybe she *should* stay and try to work it out. But, no; she was being foolish. There was nothing left to work out. Now let Craig have his Cybil, and good luck to both of them. They would probably need it!

Joni went to the back bedroom and packed enough things to last her until she could arrange to have the rest of her personal belongings picked up. The bedroom was pleasantly cool. She remembered, then, that they had had to turn off the air-conditioner last night. They had smelled wires burning, and had traced the odor to the air-conditioning unit. Well, at least Craig had done something worthwhile that day; he had remembered to call someone in to repair the air-conditioner. That must have been what he was trying to tell her as he fell asleep.

Joni went back into the kitchen and stopped for a moment beside Craig's chair. She reached down and touched his shoulder.

"Good-bye, Craig. Have yourself a good sleep. A nice, long, cool sleep."

●

Mike's Mail

Mike's Mail

Mike's Mail

Mike's Mail

BACK ISSUES

I have been a Mike Shayne fan for many years. I have some duplicate copies of MSMM back to 1962. Also have Vol. 1, No. 5 from January 1951. Have pocket books starting with the original price of 25¢. Anyone interested please send SASE.

Willie L. Pollard
P.O. Box 127
Landis, NC 28088-0127

OFFBEAT

I don't remember any "smutty" stories in your book ever, but I didn't care for the story "Spiders." It was weird. "Spiders" in a mystery magazine is not really what you would expect. Detective, con scams, espionage, crime of any form, matching wits from clues, locked door mysteries. I wish I had been gifted enough to write stories, I would send you plenty of good detective stories, so you wouldn't have to print these offbeat type stories! Love MSMM.

B. Baker
North Little Rock, Arkansas

The mystery genre covers a lot of territory, those you mentioned and others. Suspense is one of these, and a story in which a man is fighting for his life against spiders seems as though it fits the category.

Some people like offbeat stories; some people don't like offbeat stories—that's why there's a variety of material in MSMM. We'll probably never have an issue that will totally please everyone, but we'll keep trying anyway!

KEEP SENDING MSMM!

When I read the letter to you from H. F. Nessen from Salt Lake City, I had to read it twice to believe it . . .

Please do not boycott Utah from getting *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* as there are many of us here who really love this publication. When I am through reading mine, I pass it on to a friend who passes it on to a friend, and so on. I think it is one of the best paperbacks of mystery ever written. So please keep sending it to Utah . . .

Please, please do not ban this paperback from Utah. There are many of us who do buy and read it. In fact, as soon as I receive notice that my subscription is about through, I immediately subscribe again. I do not want to miss one issue.

Feel free to publish this letter, word for word, if you so desire . . .

Lorraine Spencer
1461 West 800 South Street
Salt Lake City, Utah 84104

Thanks for your vote of confidence, Lorraine. I generally don't edit letters, but I decided you got a bit too enthusiastic for the printed page. Our purpose here is to entertain, not start a civil war. I was just kidding about boycotting the state of Utah, to illustrate how absurd it is to keep people from reading what they want to read. MSMM will continue to reach you and, I hope, to merit your interest in it!

WHERE'S CATHY?

Congratulations on the great improvement in both the quality and sophistication of the *MSMM* stories. The level of literacy is refreshingly adult, too, in most of the recent stories.

The proofreading has also improved. There are maybe only a dozen or so glitches per issue over the past six or seven issues, and most of those errors are typographical ones. I haven't noticed any splice marks

lately, either, so I suspect you now have access to a word processor.

What happened to Mel D. Ames and his Cathy Carruthers/Mark Swanson stories? There haven't been any of those stories for several issues, and I had got to like them enough to be willing to buy *MSMM* if it contained only blank pages and an Ames Carruthers/Swanson mystery. His "Blood in the Rigging" (May '84 *MSMM*) is my favorite, and I like it so much that I can almost overlook the misspelling of vertical as "verticle" (first word of the second sentence of the third paragraph).

The "Mike Shayne" stories vary so greatly in technique, vocabulary, and phrasing from story to story that I'm sure other writers must be filling in for Brett Halliday quite a bit of the time. If so, that's surely understandable. It would take a real superman to come up with a new Mike Shayne story month-after-month for so many years.

Thanks for the most entertaining mystery magazine on the market, and I hope you can get Mel D. Ames back with his Cathy Carruthers and Mark Swanson.

Robert Earl McCrocklin
Box 5104
Oxnard, CA 93031-5104

Well, I knew there must be somebody out there who liked the magazine. The Shayne stories have been varying in style and so forth, but not because of a variety of writers. The author has been purposely experimenting with different techniques and approaches, some of which have worked, others of which haven't. At the end of the story in the May issue, for example, there was an attempt at an almost-stream-of-consciousness style. It didn't quite work as planned, but it's important to go occasionally in fresh directions to avoid literary stagnation in the mystery field. As for Mel D. Ames, when last heard from he was wallowing in the beauty and grandeur of the Canadian wilderness where he lives. Perhaps your letter will inspire him to give us more adventures of the lovely and talented Cathy Carruthers!

VIOLENCE TO WOMEN

I read H. F. Nessen's letter printed in your April 1985 issue and it prompted me to write this letter.

I have not found the stories to be smutty. I do have two objections, however.

(1) The covers of your magazine depict damsels in distress. This is all right if done with taste; however, the cover artist's work is distasteful to many women.

(2) The Unicorn Video advertisement appearing monthly on the back cover pictures a naked, screaming woman whose throat is cut. No wonder violence is done to women.

Since the contents of your magazine are not as salacious as its covers would indicate, why is it necessary to have such unseemly covers?

Mary V. Traeger
11118 Palmeras Dr.
Sun City, AZ 85373

I appreciate your concern, Mary, and agree wholeheartedly with you that violence should not be done to women—or men, or children, or animals. But do you really seriously believe that anyone looking at one of our covers or ads is going to be inspired to go out and commit a crime? I don't. It's dangerous to assume a cause and effect relationship that does not necessarily exist. Ambitious district attorneys around election time and censoring boards all during the year use this philosophy to their own ends, but impartial studies have shown that a causal relationship does not exist, that even in extreme cases the exposure to such material is a symptom rather than a cause, and that words and pictures might even be a kind of safety valve for letting off steam for those who may be violently inclined.

During my youth I read pulp magazines that had a lot of violence and a lot of damsels in distress on the covers. I'm sure that most of the kids who read those magazines grew up to be statesmen, ministers, lawyers, doctors, and other good people. No doubt there were a few others who became murderers, rapists, embezzlers, and editors—but it would be difficult tracing their antisocial behavior back to this artwork.

Quite a few of our covers do have a damsel in distress theme, which is part of the Grand Old Tradition, and I think with some justification: readers are more likely to be concerned about a girl character being in trouble than a man character; women are more vulnerable. Mike Shayne can get beaten up and tossed around, and it's all part of a day's work—but if it happens to Lucy Hamilton, it's an entirely different matter. As far as taste is concerned, once again we're talking about something that is a matter of opinion and except in superblatant situations difficult to assess.

While we're on the subject of sex and violence . . . I was recently reading the letter column of a top sci-fantasy magazine in which there were letters discussing the—you guessed it!—sex and violence in that

magazine. The editors admitted there was indeed sex and violence in the stories, but insisted that in those cases it was necessary to the story and not thrown in for its own sake. The problem of pleasing everyone is universal—and of course impossible to accomplish!



Got something you'd like to say to Mike, the authors, the editor, the publisher, the art director, other readers? Well, don't be bashful. Write it out and send it in, whether it's a brickbat or a bouquet. These are real letters written by real people, and without them we don't have a Mike's Mail. The address is:

*Mike's Mail
RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC.
P.O. Box 178
Reseda, CA 91335*

Let's hear from you!

“But is not all life pathetic and futile? . . . We reach. We grasp. And what is left in our hands at the end? A shadow. Or worse than a shadow—misery.”

—Sherlock Holmes
THE RETIRED COLOURMAN

When I'm alone in the apartment sometimes I think I hear a noise and I get real nervous. But I try to be careful. I'm not worried now, though. After all, I'm with you!

Nobody's Baby

by D. PAGE TRAYNOR

HAS IT COME YET? THE BUS. HAS IT COME? NO, I DIDN'T think it would have. It's due at ten after, but I've never seen it get here then.

Nice day isn't it? For winter that is. I like summer myself. Going to the beach and all that.

Is that the bus? No, it turned off. I guess we have to wait somemore. Oh, well. I don't really mind. There are always people to watch, to talk to. You know? Just think. We wouldn't have met otherwise.

No, I don't have any trouble talking to people. Ralph says I have the

subtlety of water. Ralph is my boyfriend. I don't mind. It's a compliment. Ralph says complicated women can be a drag. "Sally," that's my name, Sally. "Sally," he goes, "we have the perfect relationship. I know you're not too bright and you know you're not too bright so nobody has to pretend."

Well, maybe he could be nicer. Yeah, I'll admit it. But it's hard for us girls. I mean, you're a man. You can always find a new girl who is interested in you. Just leave when you get bored. It's harder for girls.

Still no bus. But I'm glad to have a chance to meet you. Of course I mean it. It isn't often I meet such a soft spoken man.

Look at that baby. Hi. Hello, baby. Good bye, baby. Not very pretty was it. Oops, I guess I spoke too loud. She didn't seem to like that. Yes, I suppose she was the mother. But, listen, the truth is the truth.

I'm going downtown. Shopping. Maybe pick up a new dress. What? This old thing? Well, thank you. I have always liked this dress. You don't think it's too low cut? Ralph doesn't like me to wear it, but then he is the jealous type.

Oh, you meant I was pretty. You're sweet. Ralph says my hair is like sunshine. When he's in a good mood.

I live just a few blocks away. Do you live near here? That's a nice place. Been there long? I see. It's hard moving to a new town. You don't have family here? Well, you'll like it here. It's a friendly town.

Oh, let me see your newspaper, will you? Ooo. Just look at that headline. Fourth blond killed. They've found a fourth body. All killed the same. First poisoned and then mutilated. Terrible, it's just terrible. How could that happen in this little town? It's always been so safe. Well, I won't think about it. It's too much. Besides, I'm here with you.

WHEN I'M ALONE IN THE APARTMENT SOMETIMES I THINK I hear a noise, and I get real nervous, you know what I mean. But I try to be careful. Now, I mean, what would a maniac like this one look like? It must be a real weirdo. I wouldn't sit and talk with someone like that.

No, I live by myself. Ralph doesn't want to get married yet. He says he's not ready for the responsibility.

I wouldn't mind, but maybe it's better to wait. I mean, look at my parents. My daddy left us. I was five at the time. No, I've never seen him since. I guess he just couldn't be bothered. But I don't mind. I really enjoy my life. I have a nice job. I'm receptionist at a manufacturing company. I meet a lot of salesmen, you know. Go out for a few drinks and a lot of laughs. Ralph doesn't like it, but then he dates other girls and a girl has to have fun too.

Oh, Ralph isn't so bad. He is tall and dark. Looks a little like my daddy did, as a matter of fact. I have a picture of him at the apartment. Different coloring though.

Do you think the bus is ever going to come? I don't. It happens sometimes. They break down or something. I don't suppose . . . No, I shouldn't have said anything. Really? Well, I don't suppose you would like to go somewhere and have a drink?

Your apartment? I really shouldn't. No, of course I don't think you're a murderer. Silly! Well, why not. I feel as if I've known you forever.

WHAT A NICE PLACE! VERY QUIET. WE DIDN'T MEET ANYONE coming in—I guess everyone works during the day. I like my privacy too. Mother didn't want me to get my own place, but as soon as I had enough money I got out. You know how mothers are. She wanted me to stay a baby forever. But I'm a big girl now. I'm nobody's baby.

Oh yes! I like rum. Why don't we sit here on the sofa. Just let me put my drink down here. Oh, how strong you are.

Is that your stereo? Why don't you put some music on?

That's nice. Here's your drink. I like that group. You're all ready for another one so soon?

What's the matter? You look dizzy. Sit down by me. How gold your hair is. It'll be all right. Yes it will, daddy. Of course you're daddy. Don't try to talk, it won't do any good. That stuff works so fast. Daddy, it is so good to have found you. You shouldn't have left, you know? But that's all right. You won't leave again.

If you would just stop coming back, it wouldn't be so bad. You know? I wouldn't have to keep doing this again, and again, and again, and again . . .

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

D. Page Traynor (*Nobody's Baby*):

I have had several mystery and romance novels published under pseudonyms, but this will be my first work published under my real name. I learned to read using Nancy Drew and Hardy Boy stories and mysteries have remained my favorite type of novel. Also, not that it matters, but I am a woman.

Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

A first novel of unusual interest is *When the Bough Breaks* by Jonathan Kellerman. Dr. Kellerman is a clinical psychologist specializing in children and young adults. He has obviously drawn from his personal experience in creating his detective, Dr. Alex Delaware. The story, and the plot, are convoluted but consistent. Dr. Delaware has retired from his profession in his early thirties, but all of his skills are called upon when he is asked by the police to help them in an intricate case involving a double murder and the only witness a seven-year-old child whose shocked mind has blocked out the horrible event. Delaware, himself a child psychologist, undertakes the rehabilitation of the child until she will be able to tell what she saw. Persons oversensitive to the abuse of children will find this book disturbing, but it carries a vivid and accurate picture of the depraved minds that prey on innocent young victims. There are coincidences, particularly at the end, that detract somewhat from the storytelling, but despite this Dr. Kellerman has made an impressive debut as a crime novelist, one who is highly qualified to explore the dark minds and deeds of pedophiles. (Atheneum, \$15.95)

★ ★ ★

Mignon Warner brings back her clairvoyante Edwina Charles in her latest book, *Speak No Evil*. Miss Charles' psychic powers are not tested in this work, which is a British "cozy" with a rather confusing cast of

characters. Mrs. Warner writes about a woman detective, largely for women, without pretensions of providing more than casual entertainment. There is a considerable number of murders, some old, some new, that are solved after a seance at which Miss Charles is an attendee, not the medium. The setting is a small English village and its single pub which is heavily involved in the story. The author's efforts are handicapped by one of the worse jacket covers within memory. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95)

★ ★ ★

Michael Harrison, who is an acknowledged authority on the subject, has done another book about Sherlock Holmes. This is a thin, but well-produced volume called *Decorated Mr. Holmes*. In 41 illustrated pages the author details and describes the honors and awards the great detective received during his lifetime of practice. Dr. Watson is curiously silent on this subject, but with careful scholarship the author has determined what his honors were, when conferred, and by whom. This is a very specialized item offered in a trade edition for \$12.50 and in a limited edition (121 copies) signed by the author for \$25.00. Magico Magazine, Box 156, New York, NY 10002.

★ ★ ★

From the same source we also have *Sherlock and Porlock* by Kevin L. Jones, a modest collection of five essays bearing on the literary influences in the Sherlock Holmes stories. A fine level of scholarship is evident here from a man who first distinguished himself as a published Sherlockian at the age of sixteen. This is a genuinely fascinating study of the literature availing in Holmes' day and the sources of many of the incidents in the Canon. For Sherlockian scholars, this is a most welcome addition to the literature. Prices are the same as above.

★ ★ ★

A fine and engaging study of the Nero Wolfe canon is *Rex Stout* by David R. Anderson. Professor Anderson does not write in an academic style; instead he is as clear and forthright as Archie Goodwin himself. There is an outline of Stout's life, an evaluation of the books he wrote*

*Mr. Stout stated that he was Archie Goodwin's literary agent, and not the true author of the works published under his name. This is an honored Sherlockian tradition.

and an illuminating examination of the characters of both Wolfe and his biographer. This is an engaging book sure to appeal to all of the fans of Archie Goodwin's work. (Ungar \$7.95, soft cover)

★ ★ ★

Another British cozy, and a notably good one, is *Sound Evidence* by June Thomson. The author has a very clear insight into human character, which she utilizes with considerable skill in her books. In this one Detective Chief Inspector Jack Rudd engages in a case which involves the previous murder of a police officer and some very unsavory villains. Homosexuality is a factor in the story, but the author deals with it in a tactful, quiet way that keeps it well in the background. The subtleties of British speech have a lot to do with this engaging book, particularly where police officers are concerned. Recommended. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95)

★ ★ ★

A new book by Elleston Trevor is always an event. In his latest, *Death Watch*, espionage and suspense brings to mind the memorable *On the Beach*. The Russians have developed by accident a mutant strain that wipes out a laboratory in the USSR and could wipe out the USA even if delivered in small quantity. An enormously power-hungry Russian in high position sets out to do just that—to make the whole world a soviet state, under Russian control, of course. The Russian chairman is not told as the plot develops. The dimensions of this work are at times huge, but the author knows what he is doing and the final resolution is remarkably ingenious. Quiller does not appear in this story, but his presence is not missed as the terror builds to staggering proportions. Only one thing is wrong: it's all too possible. Beaufort, price not given.

★ ★ ★

PAPERBACK NOTES. John Dickson Carr's classical mysteries involving locked rooms and impossible crimes are being reprinted by MacMillan. The specialized nature of these works has not been matched by any other author in this century. The three latest titles to be made available are *Poison in Jest*, *The Case of the Constant Suicides*, and *The Corpse in the Waxworks*. Get them all while you can. \$3.50 each . . . Walker is continuing its fine series of British mysteries in a

uniform format. Someday these are very likely going to be collector's items. Current new titles include *Coffin in Malta* by Gwendoline Butler, *Death Among the Stars* by Kenneth Giles, and *The Scottish Decision* by Alan Hunter. All titles are \$2.95, at least so far . . . Joseph Hansen's homosexual detective, Dave Brandstetter, is featured in two titles from Holt Rinehart now available in paperback, *Gravedigger* and *Nightwork*. Apart from the upsetting "Adam and Steve" sex scenes, these are fine private eye stories, well and tautly written. \$3.95 each . . . David R. Cudlip's 400-page novel of international big business combined with ruthless espionage, *Comprador*, is out in paperback from Avon. This novel of global intrigue carries the recommendation of none other than Lee Iacocca. It's more than your money's worth at \$3.95 . . . Penguin's reprints of Julian Symons' highly intelligent mysteries continues with *The Name of Annabel Lee*. Of course this modern day story is tied in with Poe's deathless poem and some of his other works, such as *The Fall of the House of Usher*. A very good entertainment for \$3.50 . . . Magician detectives, such as the Great Merlini, are well established in the literature. Patrick A. Kelley now introduces us to Harry Colderwood, who mixes his legerdemain with detection in an Avon original. The curtain goes up on this fresh new work for \$2.75 . . . Don Pendleton's Mack Bolan continues the mayhem against the bad guys in *Resurrection Day*. There are now more than 70 books in this series, which is presently published by Gold Eagle. In this new addition The Executioner rediscovers his lost brother, Johnny. Adventure enough for anyone for \$3.95 . . . Lovejoy, Jonathan Gash's conniving antique dealer, turns up in Venice in *The Gondola Scam*. Not quite as effective as Lovejoy is on his own territory, but still a good entertainment. From Penguin at \$3.50 . . . Robert B. Parker's Spenser, one of the best-known of all contemporary private eyes, appears in *Valediction*, now available from Dell at \$3.50. It's the eleventh book in the popular series . . . Lastly, Avon offers Edward Phillips' *Death is Relative*. This title was wisely changed from *Where There's a Will*, the name of one of Nero Wolfe's memorable cases. When a seventy-year-old heir inherits only half of his mother's vast estate he is driven to . . . Read the book and find out. It's yours for \$2.95. ●

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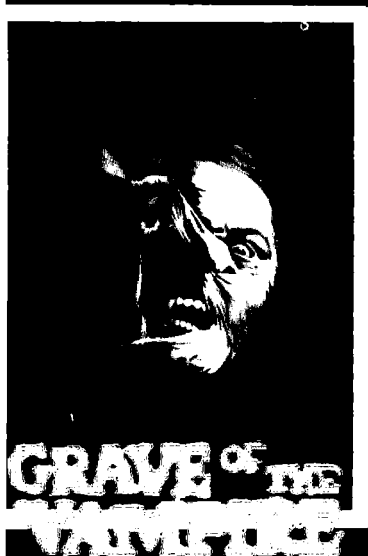
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